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ALPHONSE DAUDET

ALPHONSE DAUDET.

*Frontispiece.*

# ALPHONSE DAUDET

## A Biographical and Critical Study

BY

ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD

DISCARDED

LONDON
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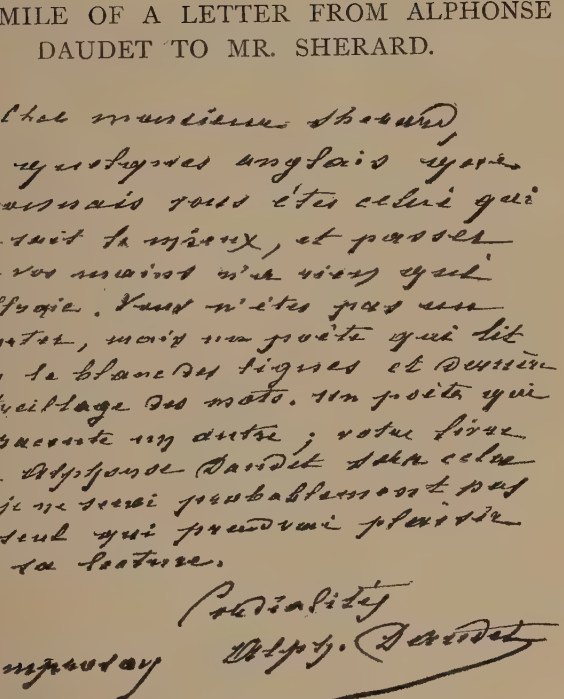
À MA MÈRE

FACSIMILE OF A LETTER FROM ALPHONSE DAUDET TO MR. SHERARD.


Cher monsieur Sherard,
Des mystères anglais vous
je connais vous êtes celui qui
me voit le mieux, et passez
par vos mains m'a rien qui
m'effraie. Vous n'êtes pas un
reporter, mais un poète qui lit
dans le blanc des lignes et devine
le travail des mots. Un poète qui
en raconte un autre ; votre livre
sur Alphonse Daudet dans celui
et je ne serai probablement pas
le seul qui prendra plaisir
à sa lecture.
Cordialités
Alph. Daudet
Champrovay
3 7bre

# PREFACE

I BY no means agree with those who hold that it is a good rule that a biography should not be written in the hero's lifetime, and often in reading the life-stories of notable men, of whom I have been a contemporary, who have died, I have found myself regretting that I did not know such and such things about them whilst they lived. It seemed to me that had I known such and such things concerning them whilst we were fellow-beings, my interest in their works would have been a keener one; and, a more important matter, my understanding of my own times would have been clearer and more comprehensive.

One likes to hear the great men of the day discussed and described in conversation; why should one, then, object to read of them?

In the matter of authors, as in the case of the

subject of this biography, it seems to me that a presentation of them in their lifetime is all the more interesting in that, knowing their histories, their methods of work, their manners of thinking, and their ways of life, one is better able to appreciate each of their new works as it appears. One is always more interested in those one knows than in entire strangers.

'And did you once see Shelley plain? . . .'

There is the ring of regret in these lines, and I fancy that Browning's regret would have been less keen if, during the years when he was Shelley's fellow-being—I am imagining him the precocious lad that no doubt he was—he could have known all things concerning the poet whom he was to reverence after his death.

And for the biographer also the task of describing a living man is as much more grateful a task than that of presenting from documents, hearsay, and the reports of friends and relations, a man who is no more, as it is for a painter to paint a portrait from a living model rather than from material supplied, or as it is for the photographer to work in full sunlight rather than when the sun has gone down.

If, as to-day is generally admitted, the human document is of interest, then is that human docu-

ment which is a precise portrayal of a living fellow-being emphatically of interest.

And, then, shall not the subject of the biography be considered? Once a man is dead, the other man who writes of him has an easy task, for the person of whom he has written will never rise to say that in this or that respect his biographer has misrepresented him, that such or such was never a motive of his, that neither this nor that ambition ever prompted him, and that many stories concerning him are but idle gossip. How much of Boswell's Life would Samuel Johnson have passed for the press, how much of the Memoirs of a Bourrienne, a Remusat, a Talleyrand, or a Barras would have stood solid fact under Bonaparte's fiery eyes?

These considerations must stand as my apology for again having taken pen in hand to write of a fellow-being whom I believe to be one in whom many take an interest.

I have to express my gratitude for assistance in my task to Madame Daudet, to her son Léon, to M. Edmond de Goncourt, and to M. Ernest Daudet, whose little book entitled 'Mon Frère et Moi' I have drawn upon for my description of his brother's early days.

Something more than gratitude is due to Alphonse Daudet himself. Since he has honoured me with

his friendship, I may say, without exaggeration, that my life of exile has been transformed. It is perhaps also on account of my admiration and my affection for this great-hearted man of letters that I have wished to make others know him as I do.

ROBERT H. SHERARD.

Capbreton, Paris,
1894.

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NOTE.—It is with great happiness that the writer can add that on the last occasion on which he saw Alphonse Daudet, after a separation of some months, during which the chapters as to his ill-health and suffering were written, 'la larme à l'œil,' he found the master in greatly improved strength, projecting work and pleasure—including a journey to England—a man altogether transformed, with bright eyes, a placid face, and a good ring in the voice.

# CONTENTS


CHAPTER I.

PAGE

THE DAUDET FAMILY - - - - - 1

CHAPTER II.

CHILDHOOD AT NÎMES - - - - - 15

CHAPTER III.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS - - - - - - 37

CHAPTER IV.

SCHOOLDAYS IN LYONS - - - - - 57

CHAPTER V.

EARLY EFFORTS - - - - - - 79

CHAPTER VI.

FACING THE WORLD - - - - - 103

CHAPTER VII.

THE EXPERIENCES OF A MR. MELL - - - - 128

CHAPTER VIII.

EARLY STRUGGLES IN PARIS - - - - 154

CHAPTER IX.

ALPHONSE DAUDET AS A POET - - - - 183

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND - - - - PAGE 208

CHAPTER XI.

ON HIS WAY REJOICING - - - - - 232

CHAPTER XII.

BY COMMAND OF THE EMPRESS - - - - 253

CHAPTER XIII.

'LE PETIT CHOSE' - - - - - - 283

CHAPTER XIV.

MADAME ALPHONSE DAUDET - - - - 302

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST YEAR OF MARRIED LIFE - - - 330

CHAPTER XVI.

ALPHONSE DAUDET'S SHORT STORIES - - - 351

CHAPTER XVII.

'FROMONT JEUNE ET RISLER AÎNÉ' - - - 372

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM SUCCESS TO SUCCESS - - - - - 391

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FATE OF POLYCRATES - - - - - 407

CHAPTER XX.

THE DAUDET OF TO-DAY - - - - - 421

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


ALPHONSE DAUDET, FROM A DRAWING BY P. RENOUARD *frontispiece*

ALPHONSE DAUDET IN HIS PAVILION - - *to face page* 48

ERNEST DAUDET - - - - ,, ,, 212

EXTERIOR OF THE PAVILION - - - ,, ,, 286

DAUDET'S HOUSE AT CHAMPROSAY - - ,, ,, 394

# ALPHONSE DAUDET

## CHAPTER I.

### THE DAUDET FAMILY.

One day when Alphonse Daudet was with Gustave Flaubert and other men of letters, the conversation turned on the respective ages of those present, and yielding to one of those inexplicable promptings of perversity, Daudet deliberately lied, reducing the number of his years by two. He has often since spoken of this incident, and in the amusing style which is one of his gifts has endeavoured to analyze the reason of his untruthfulness on this occasion, whether it proceeded from vanity, coquettishness or perversity, adding that, no sooner were the words out of his mouth than he felt heartily ashamed of himself, and was tormented by conscience all the following night, and found no peace of mind again until on the next morning he had written notes to

all who had been present, to confess his sin and to establish the truth.

In a letter in which he writes of this he adds, 'The lie has always been my preoccupation; my books are full of liars,' and goes on to contrast the two districts in France where the lie best flourishes, Gascony and Provence in the South, with Normandy in the North. The Normans, he says, have a special manner of untruthfulness, and he describes them as the 'Gascons of the North.' He has often declared that he himself is the prototype of his creation, Numa Roumestan, of Meridional insincerity, whose tongue was always in advance of his brain.

It would be difficult for Daudet to yield to such a temptation again to-day, for since then, as De Goncourt somewhere writes, 'our little Daudet has grown, has grown, has grown.' Standing now in the very forefront of French literature—'the author,' as a former director of fine arts in France recently wrote in the principal Parisian review, 'of some of the finest books of the century'—the salient particulars of his biography are matters of common knowledge.

Alphonse Daudet was born on May 13, 1840, at Nîmes, on the frontier of Provence, in the land which he himself has styled 'Le Midi pétré,' the stony South.

'I was born'—it is with these words that he opens his story 'Le Petit Chose'—'on May 13, 18—, in a town in Languedoc, where, as in all the towns in the South, one finds much sunshine, not a little dust, a Carmelite convent, and two or three Roman monuments.'

Lower down he writes:

'I must say, to begin with, that my birth did not bring happiness to the Eysette household. . . .

'In truth, I was my parents' evil star. From the day of my birth unheard-of disasters assailed them from twenty sides.'

In speaking thus of Daniel Eysette, better known as Le Petit Chose, Daudet is speaking of himself. Exceedingly superstitious, the date of his birth, or rather the dates of his birth (for 1, 8, 4, 0 added together form a total of 13 also), have always appeared to him of evil omen, and he has come to look upon himself as predestined to sorrow, as exemplified first by a most unhappy childhood and youth, and, after a period of radiant happiness, by a tormented and pain-racked maturity. In spite of this fact, except when acutely suffering from the rheumatic pains with which he is constantly tortured, Daudet is, and has always been, gay, bright, cheerful, and of a radiating warmth of geniality and happiness. In this respect he differs widely from his illustrious

contemporary, Emile Zola, who, in good health and in the flush and tide of fame and fortune, is always morose, querulous, dissatisfied, and unhappy.

It may be wondered at that a man of Daudet's brilliant intellect should be superstitious, should 'have a horror of the number thirteen,' and 'would not walk under a ladder or travel on a Friday for any consideration,' as he himself has confessed. But it must be remembered that Daudet is a Meridional, with all the qualities and defects of the Meridional carried to their extremest degree. It is as a Meridional that he is superstitious ; it is to his race that his occasional harmless want of veracity must be attributed. Napoleon was a Meridional also, and also superstitious and wanting in truthfulness. It is one of Daudet's dearest wishes to say his say about Napoleon, and to explain and excuse his character and his actions by his Meridionalism. Napoleon's utter untruthfulness, too often baneful, could, however, hardly be excused on this ground.

Alphonse Daudet was the son of Vincent Daudet and his wife Adeline, whose maiden name was Reynaud, which in Provençal *patois* means a little bird, or wren. Daudet is very fond of seeking the significations of family names, and attaches importance to these significations. As to his own patronymic, he is doubtful whether to derive it from

'Deodat,' a very common name in Provence, and which, abbreviated from *Deo datus*, means 'given by God,' or,—and this is the derivation which he would prefer,—from a Moorish word signifying David. It is probable that this latter version is the correct one, for most undoubtedly the Daudet family is of Moorish extraction. One has but to look at Alphonse Daudet's eldest son, Léon, to be convinced of that. He has all the appearance of a handsome Oriental in a Parisian drawing-room. The name of Daudet, or, as it is more commonly written, Daudé, is frequently met with in Languedoc. An art-critic, an engineer, and two Protestant theologians gave it repute in the eighteenth century, and there flourished also in 1720 and the following decade a certain Chevalier Daudet, who accompanied Louis XV. to Strasburg and wrote, besides other works, a poetical description of the King's journey. Alphonse Daudet smiles at his brother Ernest's endeavour to connect this gentleman with their family and to trace their genealogy from other noble sources. He has no feeling at all with reference to the conventional superiorities of birth and fortune. In this respect he again differs from Emile Zola, and from his intimate friend, Edmond de Goncourt. The latter, to judge from his journal, attaches considerable importance

to questions of gentility, whilst Zola cannot disguise his satisfaction at the immense receipts which he derives from his literary productions. This is not written in any spirit of personal criticism, and the trait is comprehensible enough when one remembers through what stress of poverty the author of the Rougon-Macquart series passed. He is surely entitled to the joy of conquest, the conquest of the bank-note. Daudet, on the other hand, neither esteems nor contemns gentility of birth or greatness of fortune, acquired or inherited. He is the same man when entertaining an ambassador as when extending his lavish hospitality to the most ragged Bohemian of letters. If he is pleased to hear that such an one of his friends is deriving large profits from the sales of his books, his interest is certainly keener in the case of an unsuccessful writer, because he feels that over such his quasi-paternity and kindest hospitality can be more effectually exercised. Of his own large gains he never speaks, though he will frequently relate the story of his days of penury.

Jacques Daudet, the father of Vincent Daudet and grandfather of Alphonse and Ernest, was a simple Cévenol peasant, who at the beginning of the Revolution settled in Nîmes and began to exercise the craft of silk-weaver. During the Revolution,

when the scaffold remained standing permanently on the esplanade of Nîmes, as a terror to the Royalists of that most anti-Jacobin district, Jacques Daudet very nearly lost his life for expressing sympathy — 'Ah, li paouri gent! (Oh, the poor fellows)' were his words—whilst thirty victims from Beaucaire, accused of complicity with the Vivarais Royalists, were being marched, singing the *Miserere*, to the guillotine. He was seized on by the guards, and would have shared the fate of those whom he had pitied, but for the kindness of one of the attendants, who helped him to make good his escape. He was careful in future not to manifest his sentiments in public, having learned a good lesson from his own experience and the sad fate of his brother Claude, who was massacred by the Republicans in 1790.

His business appears to have prospered, and under the Consulate Jacques Daudet is found, no longer a workman, at the head of a flourishing shop where are retailed the products of the Nîmes silk industry, at that time a formidable rival to Lyons. In the meanwhile he had married, and was the father of two sons and three daughters. Vincent Daudet was his fourth child.

Speaking of his father, Ernest Daudet says that at the age of twenty he was a handsome man, with his Bourbon head, his black hair, his high

complexion and full eyes. The progress of the family towards burgherdom was marked in his dress, and he always wore a tight-fitting frock-coat and a white tie, that emblem of respectability in France. With Alphonse and Ernest another step was taken away from Jacques Daudet's workman's blouse, and as to the fourth generation, Alphonse Daudet's sons, Léon and Lucien, are the best-dressed young men in Paris.

Vincent did not enjoy much education, and never got beyond the rudiments of Latin. His father took him into the business at the age of sixteen, sending him to all parts of France in charge of a large van stocked with silk goods, for sale wherever buyers could be found. There was education of a practical sort in this life, and a good training in courage and manliness. Travelling, often at night, with a valuable load was a risky thing in those unsettled days when the *chauffeurs* and other bands of brigands were abroad, and Vincent Daudet did well to carry with him two well-primed pistols in a little green case.

It may be that it was during these hazardous expeditions across France that the spirit of romance and adventure was infused into the mental organism of the Cévenol peasant's son, and that his faculty of imagination was awakened, qualities afterwards

transmitted by him to his son. In 1830 Vincent Daudet married Adeline Reynaud, 'a woman slight and frail, with an olive complexion and large and mournful eyes, whose physical development had been delayed by a sickly childhood; a dreamy, romantic nature, passionately fond of reading, and preferring to live with the heroes of the books on which she fed her imagination, rather than with the realities of life; in spite of this, the soul of a saint, and of infinite gentleness.'

Adeline Reynaud was descended from an excellent family, and Ernest Daudet, who, as his brother Alphonse once said, 'used to be ambitious,' has given a long account of the history of this family in his book 'Mon Frère et Moi.' The family seat, La Vignasse, was bought in 1645 by Jean Reynaud, son of Sebastien Reynaud, of Boisseron, and one of his descendants, William Reynaud, emigrating to England under the Revolution, founded an important business in *articles de Paris*—Paris fancy goods. He afterwards went to Russia, and was mixed up in the first conspiracy against Paul I., and in consequence was exiled to Siberia, his fortune being confiscated. He was afterwards pardoned by Alexander I. and reinstated in his property. He is known in the Daudet family as 'the Russian uncle.'

One of his brothers, known in the family as 'the

uncle Abbé,' Francis Reynaud, entered holy orders and emigrated to England when in danger of his life under the Convention. Mastering the English language, he was able to earn his living in London by teaching English to his fellow-exiles. A beautiful English girl, 'rich and distinguished,' fell violently in love with him, and there was every inducement held out to him to forget his vow and condition, which for reasons of policy he had disguised in England. He, however, remained firm. Under the Consulate he was allowed to return to France, and applied himself to teaching, being eventually appointed principal of the Alais College, where, thanks to this circumstance, his grand-nephew was afterwards to be admitted as an usher, and to eat his hard-earned bread with bitter and despairing tears.

It was Antoine, a younger brother of 'the Russian uncle' and of Abbé Reynaud, who was the father of Adeline. He lived in Nîmes, where he had founded a business for the purchase of silk yarns from the peasants and small spinners of the neighbouring district, and for their sale to the principal weavers of Nîmes, Avignon, and Lyons. His business was a very prosperous one; he acquired a handsome fortune, and the Reynauds of Nîmes were looked up to as amongst the aristocracy

of the Provençal frontier town. Adeline, the eldest of Antoine Reynaud's six children, was considered an excellent *parti*, and all the young men of Nîmes envied Vincent Daudet when he carried her off. After his marriage, Vincent Daudet went into partnership with his elder brother, to carry on the business founded by their father.

The union of Vincent and Adeline, though in itself a happy one, was saddened almost from the outset by a series of troubles and disasters. The children born to the marriage died off one after the other, with the exception of Henri, their eldest son, a sickly child, whose constant ill-health caused great anxiety to his parents. Adeline's mother—'Grandmamma Reynaud,' who was a great favourite with the Daudets—died suddenly of inflammation of the lungs. One of Adeline's brothers, engaging in imprudent speculations in Lyons, brought the fortune of the Reynauds into jeopardy, and constant dissensions troubled the partnership of the Daudet Brothers. So impossible did it become for them to agree, that a dissolution was decided upon and effected. The two brothers, no longer partners, became commercial rivals. The elder, continuing as his father had begun, prospered and amassed a fortune, which is still enjoyed by his descendants; Vincent, less fortunate or less skilful, did not meet

with such success. The spirit of adventure infused into his mental organism in the course of his hazardous expeditions across France led him astray in his commercial operations. Casting aside the prudence of the Cévenol peasant his father, just as he had cast aside the Cévenol peasant's blouse, he embarked in industrial experiments which were doomed to failure, and which eventually led to his ruin.

It was into this family that Alphonse Daudet was born on May 13, 1840—the son of a man whose life so far had been unsuccessful and embittered, who had not within him the elements of success; and of a woman of a dreamy and melancholy nature, whose large and mournful eyes had wept and wept as child after child of hers had died, for of a numerous family there remained to her only two sons, Henri, the firstborn, a sickly child, and Ernest, who was three years old at the time of the birth of Alphonse.

The Daudets were living at that time in a house, still standing in Nîmes, known as the Maison Sabran, situated on the Petit Cours, nearly opposite the church of Saint Charles, behind which is the faubourg called Enclos de Rey, inhabited at that time by silk-spinners and labourers, a revolutionary and excitable population, which for a century past

had taken part in all the risings of the old city. The Petit Cours was the centre of the life of Nîmes, 'a fit place,' writes Ernest Daudet, 'for tumultuous assemblings.' From the Place des Carmes to the Place Ballore it was planted with four rows of plane-trees, which in the summer were powdered with white dust and all alive with shrill *cicades*. It was on the Petit Cours that all the bloody scenes of the Revolution in Nîmes were enacted, notably the massacre which the Nîmois still speak of with a shudder as 'La Bagarre,' in the course of which a Daudet lost his life. It was down the Petit Cours that, on the morrow of Waterloo, General Gilly, at the head of his *chasseurs*, galloped, a pistol in one hand, a sword in the other, holding the bridle of his horse between his teeth, to take refuge in the Cévennes, abandoning the Bonapartists of the town to the fury of the Royalists.

The Daudet *ménage* occupied the second story of the Maison Sabran, and it was in one of the rooms of this *étage* that Alphonse was born. The first-floor was divided between Vincent Daudet and a cousin, who both had their workshops here.

In writing of himself in 'Le Petit Chose' that he was his parents' evil star, and that from the day of his birth the most unheard-of disasters assailed them on every side, Daudet was only exercising the

novelist's right to adapt his personal experiences to the requirements of his work. As a matter of fact, at the time of his birth his parents' troubles had to some extent been appeased, business was promising in the future, and it was not until six years later that the ruin of the Daudet-Reynaud family definitely began, to be consummated in 1848.

'At first,' writes Ernest Daudet, 'we knew nothing but comfort, and grew up in an atmosphere of affection side by side—in an hourly intimacy which created between us that indestructible friendship which has ever remained alive, unbroken for even a single day.'

## CHAPTER II.

### CHILDHOOD AT NÎMES.

'AMONGST contemporary story-tellers and novelists there is an author who at his birth received all the gifts with which the mind can be endowed. I am speaking of M. Alphonse Daudet. I will apply to him, trite as it may be, the old fable of our fairy-tales. I fancy that all the fairies came together round his cradle, each of them to give him a rare quality with a touch of the wand; one gave him grace, another charm, a third the smile that wins love, a fourth the tender emotion which leads to success. And what is most wonderful is that the wicked fairy, whose custom it is to arrive last of all in order to destroy all these precious gifts by some evil present, was so late on that occasion that she was not even able to enter; yes, the wicked fairy remained at the door, and blessings only were showered on the head of the future author of "Les Contes du Lundi" and of "Fromont jeune et Risler

aîné." I wish therefore to study in M. Alphonse Daudet a happy nature, one of the most charming and most interesting cases in our contemporary literature.'

It was thus that more than fifteen years ago Emile Zola wrote of his fellow-writer in naturalism, his co-heir to Balzac, in the Russian journal *Le Messager de l'Europe*. At that time, indeed, Daudet appeared to be one of those few fortunate men for whom Fortune has nought but smiles. Yet indeed the wicked fairy of the fable stood also by Daudet's cradle, and her vow was to the effect that after a most unhappy youth the child, grown man, should taste of all the raptures of realized ambition—fame, fortune, friendship—and that then suddenly, when the draught was sweetest, the cup should be struck from his lips, and an almost unceasing torment come upon him to plague his body, to vex his mind, to strike his hand with ague, to render work which was his delight a bitter task, and to poison the pleasures to which he was accustomed, and of which, by custom, he had grown fond.

When one sees him, as those who have the privilege of frequenting his beautiful Paris home may see him —a man in the age of the full force of maturity, haggard of face, with pain-drawn lips, and eyes in which the old and splendid fire flashes only when

revived with a lethal drug, dragging his wrecked body laboriously step by step on unwilling limbs, forced to avail himself of a friendly arm in order to traverse a space over which little Charles, his grandson, could toddle briskly, and for even the shortest distance obliged to support himself with one hand on a stick and the other on a chair; when one sees the once ready pen rebelling in his nerveless fingers, so painfully, indeed, that in despair at this revolt he has been heard to ask for information as to that Jacquard of the pen, the typewriter; when one hears him speak, not without melancholy, of plans formed in days of stress for the heyday, which, now that the heyday has arrived, never can be realized,—then indeed can one imagine the wicked fairy, and hear her cruel pronouncement and the spiteful rap of her wand.

In speaking of his life on a recent occasion, Alphonse Daudet, referring to his childhood, said to the writer: 'I have often tried to collect the memories of my childhood, so as to write them out in Provençal, the language of my native land; but my youth was such a sad one that these are all summed up in the title of a book of my *souvenirs de jeunesse*, "Mi Poou," which in Provençal means "My Fears." Yes, fears and tears, that is of what my youth consisted. My childhood at home was a

lamentable one. I have no recollection of home which is not a sorrowful one—a recollection of tears. The baker who refuses bread; the servant whose wages cannot be paid, who declares that she will stay on without wages, and becomes familiar in consequence, and says "thou" to her master; the father always scolding; the mother always in tears.'

In his case time does not seem to have effaced what was bitter and hard to bear, leaving, as with most men it does, on the tablets of memory only such things as are pleasant to remember. Yet, according to his brother Ernest, his early childhood was surrounded with comfort and warmed with tender affection, and, according to his account also, in 'Le Petit Chose,' there was much in his early life to charm an imaginative child.

'At that time,' says Ernest Daudet, 'we filled the old Maison Sabran with our games.' Although the boys' father, soured by ill-fortune, no doubt, would not allow his children the run of his workshops on the first-floor of the old house, there adjoined his offices the premises of a cousin, who was very friendly to Ernest and Alphonse. This cousin had an old clerk who adored children, and used to fit the two lads out with cocked hats of paper and epaulettes made out of the fragments of silk stuffs with which the workshops were littered; and then,

arming them with swords, and corking ferocious moustachios on their baby faces, he would send them in this brave array up to their mother, whom they would almost invariably find seeking oblivion from the hard realities of life in her favourite books.

'This passionate taste for books, which we have inherited from her,' writes Ernest Daudet, 'was one of the consolations of her life. When quite a little girl she used to take refuge in the remotest corners of her father's store-rooms, and, nestling down between two bales of silk, would give herself up in all quiet to the pleasure of reading. Later on it was still to reading that she consecrated all her leisure time. It is incontestable that it is from her that we derive the vocation which later threw us into a literary life.'

At the age of three Alphonse Daudet was described as a pretty little boy, with large brown eyes, chestnut hair, a pallid complexion, and features of exquisite delicacy. He was a very passionate child, and used to rebel in the most violent manner against any repression of his outbursts of anger.

It is related that one day he was locked up alone in a room, as a punishment for some childish fault, but acted with such violence that his parents were forced to release him. They found him covered with bruises which he had inflicted upon himself by

dashing himself in his fury against the walls of his prison.

This violence of character, which since his manhood he has had the strength to control, was doubtless inherited by him from his grandmothers, and especially from his father. 'As a child it was the dominant trait of his character; and for this reason his education was a difficult task. There was in him the strangest mixture of docility and indiscipline, of goodness and obstinacy; and with this an unquenchable thirst for adventures and the unknown, the danger of which his shortsightedness, which age has developed, greatly aggravated.

'This shortsightedness has played my brother more than one scurvy trick. Thanks to it, he has more than once been half drowned, burned, poisoned, and run over; and even to-day (in 1880) he is obliged to take a friend's arm to cross the boulevard when traffic is heavy. It has often made people think, when he passed them by without seeing them, that he affected, from indifference or contempt, not to recognise them. But at the same time it has rendered him a single service; it has forced him to live within; it has endowed him with the strangest and most precious faculty—a faculty which I have met with in him alone, a kind of inner sight, or, if you prefer the expression, an intuition of ex-

traordinary force, thanks to which, if he happens not to see with his eyes the face of the person who is speaking to him, he is able to guess what it is like, and at the same time to fathom what is in that person's mind. For my part, I cannot explain this intensity of insight in a shortsighted man. Passing through life like a blind man, in each of his books he gives proof of a minute and attentive power of observation, of almost microscopic acuteness.

'These qualities, which were dormant in the child, awoke into being in the young man. In the child they were dominated by a vivacity, a turbulence, and a temerity which caused our mother to tremble when he was not hanging on to her skirts or under the careful eyes of our servant. But at the same time his nature was the most straightforward, his heart the most generous, and his mind the most open. Oh, what a good little chum I had in him!'

Thus his brother. As to these violent outbursts of passion, either self-control or physical depression have entirely dominated them; so that to-day, except in point of vivacity of expression on any subject which lies near his heart in love or hatred, Daudet may be described as a most placid man, of equable temper and perfect self-restraint. In the days of full manhood, it is true, his patience had its limits, and he was always prompt to challenge any attack

on his reputation or on his character. It was in consequence of the publication of an article which offended him, in an English boulevard newspaper of Paris, of which the late Theodore Child was editor, that he first entered into relations with the brilliant and unfortunate correspondent of *The World*. He wrote to Child to say that he was not patient under aspersions of that nature, and, indeed, began to make preparations for a reparation of his wounded honour by arms. The duel was averted, however, thanks to a letter from Child, who explained that the article had appeared, in his absence, without his consent, and added that for no consideration would he offend a gentleman for whom he had such an admiration as he had for Alphonse Daudet. The letter was so well turned,—for Child had a perfect knowledge of French,—that whilst appeasing Daudet's wrath, it made him desire to know the author. It was thus that 'Theoc' made Daudet's acquaintance, an acquaintance which was of the greatest advantage to him during his too brief career in Paris. Daudet, on his side, appears to have equally appreciated the journalist.

It was in an outburst of temper, also, that one day in 1884 he sent his seconds to Delpit, the novelist, who had offended him in an article on the Academy, in which he had spoken of Daudet as a

man of Punic perfidy. The duel took place three days later at Vésinet. De Goncourt relates that he was asked, in case anything happened, to take a letter to Madame Daudet, 'for you are the person whom she loves best after her husband, her children, papa, and mamma.' Fortunately De Goncourt's services were not needed in this respect; a telegram arriving in the course of the morning, in which Daudet announced the issue of the duel in the following terms: 'Je rentre du Vésinet, j'ai fiché un coup d'épée à Delpit,' in which Daudet's fondness for expressive slang is manifested.

Considering Daudet's shortsightedness, which, as his brother wrote, is intense, it is easy to understand how nervous his friends always felt when he was out on the field of honour, and his duels have been numerous. To-day he is no longer able to handle a sword, and has been heard to regret it, especially because this incapacity prevents him from expressing his opinions in the press on current French politicians and politics, for whom and which he has the greatest contempt. He agrees almost entirely with what Drumont writes day by day in *La Libre Parole*, and would be glad to say his say also on the abominations of the third Republic; 'but,' as he adds with a sigh, 'there must be a rapier behind the pen.'

In the days before he was stricken with rheumatism, his shortsightedness does not appear to have interfered with his activity on the *terrain*, for his duels were for the most part in his favour. To-day his sight has improved, though he still wears a very powerful single eyeglass, and he easily recognises anyone across the room. This infirmity and the occasional gestures of helplessness which proceed from it, add in his case, as in that of all shortsighted people, to the sympathy which he inspires, as any invalid does, in even the least generous. When at his writing-table and at work, he bends so low over his paper that his long hair often sweeps the page as he writes. One would fancy one's self beholding a scientist at work on some minute research with the microscope ; it is typical and emblematic.

According to the French custom, shortly after his birth little Alphonse was put out to nurse at Fons, a village near Nîmes. Fons must have been so called on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, for, like most Provençal villages, it possessed neither fountain nor well, and its inhabitants were forced to go eight miles to procure water. It was the most arid of places, and it is to this privation of water in his childhood that Alphonse Daudet attributes the immense desire for the sea and a sailor's life which haunted his boyish brain in the parched champaign,

a desire which, after he had read his 'Robinson Crusoe,' became at times a mania. It was with intense pride that one day on a Rhone steamer, when thirteen years of age, he passed himself off untruthfully, in conversation with some passengers, as a midshipman, his *lycée* or school uniform giving verisimilitude to his tale. It appears that his imposture was detected and exposed by some more knowing bystander, but not before he had thrilled his audience with a story of the most moving escapes. He sometimes relates this anecdote when speaking of his Meridional tendency to untruthfulness.

So scarce was water in the district that the washerwomen of the village were obliged to carry their linen by train to the Rhone, bringing back the moist packets of clothes in the evenings. It was usual for the villagers to go and meet the train by which they arrived, so as to get on their passage a whiff of cool air and the scent of the water. One of Daudet's earliest remembrances is of the delight with which the smell of the wet clothes used to fill him, thrilling his fevered brain with a vision of a boundless ocean of cool and sparkling water.

The husband of Daudet's foster-mother was an innkeeper whose name was Garrimon, which is Provençal for Mountain Rat. Daudet considers

this a splendid name, and often regrets that he has always forgotten to use it in one of his stories. The drinking-rooms of Garrimon's inn were on the first floor of the house, whilst the room where the foster-child slept was a story higher. Daudet remembers how he used to hear the brigand-like, black-bearded, dark-eyed and long-haired men stamping up the wooden stairs that led to the tap-room as he lay in bed of nights, and how gradually their voices would swell into a tumult—such an excitable race is the Provençal—stimulated by each other's talk and by draughts of harmless lemonade. Sometimes, hearing the clash of steel, he would rise from his bed and peep out of the window, to see that all these wild-looking, though most harmless, villagers were armed to the teeth — one with a scythe, another with an old-fashioned flint-lock, a third with a rusty cutlass, and some with flails or bludgeons. He would then know that a mad dog was out and about, and, hurrying back to bed all trembling with fear, would draw the clothes over his head, and yet strain his ears to hear what was being said below, starting with affright each time the words *Kin foü* arose above the tumult of voices, the clinking of glasses and bottles, and the clatter of arms. Thus trembling, he would think of the *Kin foü*, the mad dog, and of the terrible weapons

that the men carried because they, strong, black-bearded men, were as frightened of him as the little quaking wretch who shivered at every sound that the wind made in the eaves of the old house. At times his imagination would be so worked upon, and his fear become so strong, that he would jump from his bed, and running to Néno, his foster-mother, would cling to her skirts for protection.

On one occasion the little boy actually met the *Kin foü*—a *rencontre* which brought his horror to a climax, and left an ineffaceable impression on his mind. It was on a summer evening, and he was walking home, carrying a little basket, along a path white with dust, which led through thickly-foliaged vines. Suddenly he heard a violent outburst of wild cries: 'Aou kin foü! Aou kin foü!' followed by a discharge of firearms. Mad with terror, he jumped into the vines, rolling head over heels in the dust, and as he lay there, unable to stir a finger, he heard the rush of the mad dog as it went by, as though a hurricane was passing, stones flying to the right and to the left, and a great cloud of white dust in the air—heard his furious panting, and saw the gleam of his devouring eyes. His heart stopped beating in a paroxysm of terror, and he has never forgotten the violence of the alarm that overwhelmed him.

Since that time Daudet has had an absolute horror of dogs, and has extended it, indeed, to all animals. He admits that such a dislike for any of Nature's works is strange in a poet, but he is unable to master it, and is uncompromising in his hatred. He considers animals the most ugly and vilest part of creation, the caricatures of what is basest and most loathsome in man. His children have all inherited his horror of dogs.

So deeply was the impression of this adventure engraved on his mind that at the age of nineteen, when spending a summer holiday in the Chevreuse Valley, not far from Madame Juliette Adam's place at Gif, the recollection of that terrible afternoon came upon him so violently that, borrowing Victor Hugo's title, he wrote 'The Forty Days of a Condemned Man,' in which he essayed to depict, day by day, the sensations of a man who has been bitten by a mad dog. The work actually made him ill of a nervous malady, and before he had finished writing it he had grown to believe that he had indeed been bitten, and the result was that his horror was confirmed and strengthened. To this day the sight of a dog is enough to distress him exceedingly.

Speaking on this subject to the writer, Daudet on one occasion remarked: 'This phenomenon

reminds me of what I have often noticed before, that man may be compared to a book, of which the contents are stereotyped at the outset of its career, and only fresh editions printed afterwards; by which I mean that a man's character and habits are crystallized whilst he is still a very young man, and in after-life he only goes through the same phases of emotion over and over again.' Which is what Wordsworth and Milton before him had also noticed and enunciated in memorable words.

Little Alphonse was a weakly child, and for this reason he was not sent to school to learn his alphabet. It was his mother who taught him to read and write, and at the age of six, besides these accomplishments, he knew a few words of Spanish, and could play one or two airs on the guitar. He was considered a precocious child. During the last years of his life in Nîmes he was placed under the care of the Reverend Fathers of the Christian Doctrine, who maintained discipline and attention in the class-room with a rod that was kept in pickle in a bucket of brine which stood beside the master's desk. The rebellious and passionate little Alphonse often tasted of this rod, and was in a position to testify to the efficacy with which salt water enhances the sting of an instrument of chastisement.

'He remembered, with a shudder'—so he writes of Numa Roumestan, that is to say, of Alphonse Daudet—'the bucket full of brine under the master's desk, in which the rods were soaked to render the leather thongs more stinging—the immense tiled class-room in which the boys had to repeat their lessons on their knees, where as the lightest punishment the culprit had to drag himself along, now extending, now withdrawing his hand, until he reached the straight and rigid monk in his well-creased black robe, which gathered itself up under his arms with the effort of striking— . . . . the *han* of the worthy brother, and the burning sting on the ends of the little inky fingers. . . . And when Hortense expressed her indignation at the brutality of these punishments, Roumestan told her of others still more ferocious, as, for example, when the boys were forced to lick the tiles with their tongues just after the floor had been watered and the dust had turned to mud, until the tender palates of the culprits became sore.'

But there were pleasures also in the lives of the two brothers, and Ernest Daudet relates with what joy they used, on Sundays, to accompany their parents, together with half a dozen uncles and aunts and male and female cousins of their own age, in an old *calèche* on excursions into the surrounding country.

Now the drive would be to Fons to visit Garrimon, the Mountain Rat, and Néno, his wife, in their old tavern; now to Marguerites, or Manduel, or Monfrin, where the other foster-parents of the Daudet children lived. After a long day spent on the white roads, which led through vineyards and olive-groves, and after succulent repasts with their hosts, the children would drive back home, drowsy, and lulled by the Provençal songs which the elder people sang.

Then when the Beaucaire fair took place, Vincent Daudet and his wife, leaving the two children at home, with the full run of the house, would drive away with a van full of goods to do business. It is in the following picturesque terms that Alphonse Daudet describes this fair in 'Numa Roumestan':

'In our Southern provinces it was the holiday of the year—the one diversion of all those shrivelled existences. Preparation was made for it long in advance; people spoke of it long after it had passed by. Men would promise it to their wives, to their children, as a reward, bringing back home to them, where it was not possible to take them to the fair, some piece of Spanish lace, some toy, stored at the bottom of the portmanteau. The Beaucaire fair was, moreover, under the name of business, the

pretext for a fortnight, a month, of free, exuberant life, full of unforeseen events—the life of a Bohemian camp. Beds were made at this or that citizen's house, visitors slept on the counters in the shops, or in the streets under the outstretched canvas of the vans, in the bright light of the stars of a July firmament. Oh, the business done away from the weary shops; the trafficking as one dined in shirt-sleeves on the thresholds of the houses; the booths in a long line in the meadow on the bank of the Rhone, which itself was but a moving fair, cradling its boats of every kind of build; its *lahuts* with their lateen-sails, which had come from Arles, from Marseilles, from Barcelona, or the Balearic Islands, laden with wines, with anchovies, with cork, with oranges, decked with oriflammes and streamers which fluttered noisily in the cool air and were mirrored in the rapid waters. And the shouts, the motley crowd of Spaniards, Sardinians, Greeks in long tunics and embroidered slippers, Armenians in furred caps, Turks with their vests trimmed with gold lace, their fans, and their ample pantaloons of gray linen, hustling each other in the open-air restaurants, or at the booths where were sold children's toys, walking-sticks, parasols, silver-ware, *pastilles du serail*, men's caps.'

During their father's absence the boys reigned as

sovereigns over the old house, and filled it with the noise of their games; but much as they enjoyed this liberty their father's return was always eagerly looked forward to, for he never came back from Beaucaire without bringing some toys or books from the fair for his sons.

Few children have as many toys as had the little Daudets, for besides those they had inherited from Henri, their eldest brother, they were constantly receiving presents of playthings from their numerous relations. Alphonse, however, was very destructive, always wanting to know what was inside the various toys and what it was that made them act, as afterwards he wanted to know about the human heart.

One of the boys' favourite playthings was a miniature theatre, and it was Alphonse who improvised the dialogues and scenes for its puppets, as he was afterwards to do for the first actors and actresses in France. But the plaything of which the children were most fond was a set of furniture and dresses which enabled them to play at Mass—an altar, with altar-cloth, chandeliers, tabernacle, pyx, monstrance, and cup. The altar-cloth had been cut by Madame Daudet out of an old embroidered dress, and it was she also who had sewn the surplices and albs. An uncle in Lyons had sent a chasuble, a crosier, and a mitre. It was

with these things that the lads used to play at Mass in the large attics at the top of the house, where the warpers used to work. These girls, five or six in number, took real pleasure in these mimic services, in which the boys' little cousins (Emma, Marie, and Leonce) used to take part.

It may be remarked in this connection that his early religious training and the infusion of religion even into his childish games seem to have had little after-effect on Alphonse Daudet either as a man or as an author. With the exception of 'L'Evangeliste,' the religious question is rarely treated of in his books, and in his conversation, with all its extensive range, is carefully, not to say systematically, avoided. Zola is pleased to speak of his doubts, and to write of them. Daudet, from reverence, it may be, or from consideration of others, or perhaps, indeed, from indifference, is silent both with tongue and pen. It is true that after the publication of 'L'Evangeliste' he received a sharp lesson as to the danger that there lies in touching what is the intensest interest of most men. Showers of insulting, and even menacing, letters poured in on him from all quarters; the book raised up around him, who till then had but friends and admirers in the public, numerous and bitter enemies. 'After its publication,' he told the writer, 'I was flooded with

anonymous letters, some of the most offensive character.'

One night, just as he was leaving his house to go and dine with Pailleron, a parcel was handed to him by his porter. Its contents were of a nature often addressed to Zola with ampler justification. A letter was enclosed written by twelve readers of the book who had taken umbrage at the author's opinions. It was a filthy sheet and filthily worded, but by its production at the right moment in Pailleron's smoking-room Daudet was able to illustrate in a practical and convincing manner to what excesses men can be provoked by adverse criticism of their religious principles, a subject on which he had designedly turned the conversation. The letter was handed round amongst the authors present, and all said that it was the worst thing of the kind they had ever seen.

These mock Masses gave rise on one occasion to a violent scene, which is still remembered in the Daudet family as the 'histoire de la Sainte Vierge' It led to the suppression of this game. Little Emma, clad in a white alb and crowned with roses, was being carried in procession all over the house seated in a basket, which the girls in the warping-room had lent the children. One wore the mitre, another the chasuble, a third carried the crosier.

All were singing psalms, and at the head of the procession walked Alphonse Daudet disguised as a choir-boy, ringing a bell. Suddenly Vincent Daudet, the father, who just at that moment was discussing some important business with one of his principal customers from Lyons, rushed out of his office in a frenzy of irritation, and dispersing the procession to the right and to the left, fell upon little Emma, tore the alb into shreds, and sent the rose-wreath flying down the stairs. In the evening he gave orders that there were to be no more processions and no more mock Masses.

Vincent Daudet was beginning to become soured by his unceasing ill-fortune.

## CHAPTER III.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

Amongst the presents which Vincent Daudet used to bring home to his sons from the fair at Beaucaire were,—what both Ernest and Alphonse liked best of any,—magazines and books. Thus they acquired 'Robinson Crusoe' (in two illustrated volumes), 'The Swiss Family Robinson,' and a whole collection in ten large volumes of the *Journal des Enfants*, containing, under such attractive titles as 'The Mysteries of Pierrefitte Castle; or, The Adventures of Jean-Paul Chopart,' exciting stories by men like Jules Janin, Frederick Soulié, or Edouard Ourliac. The story, however, which pleased little Alphonse the most—a story which, like most romance and adventure loving boys, he used to read and re-read until he nearly knew that whole wonderful Odyssey by heart—was 'Robinson Crusoe.'

'In the evening,' he relates, 'after supper, I used to read my "Robinson" over again; I used to learn

it by heart. In the daytime I used to play it; I used to play it with a sort of frenzy, and everything that surrounded me was made to take part in the game. The factory was no longer a factory, it was my desert island—oh, very deserted! The fountain basins represented the ocean. The garden stood for the untrodden forest. In the plane-trees were swarms of cicadas who had parts in the piece and did not know it.'

A red-haired youth, who had never heard of Robinson Crusoe, used to help out the game by imitating the yells of infuriated savages. So terrible were the screams of this red-haired youth, who entered zealously into his part, that at times Alphonse as Crusoe would get quite frightened, and implore him to stop. The same lad frequently took the part of the faithful Friday; at other times, alone as he was, he would enact a crew of mutineers in a life-like and impressive manner. Unfortunately he was a common, ill-bred boy, who used very bad language and taught Alphonse to swear, so that one day at dinner Vincent Daudet was shocked to hear a fearful oath from his little son. Having learned how Alphonse had got to know such language, he at once forbade him to play with the red-haired little boy.

Besides 'Robinson Crusoe,' the two books which

Alphonse Daudet liked best at that time were Marryat's 'Midshipman Easy' and Cooper's 'The Pilot.' His reading filled him with an intense longing for the sea; he used to dream of all that water and of the cold winds blowing across the brine. This early impression comes back to him even at the present day, nor has his admiration for these first novels ever diminished.

It was thanks to these day-dreams which his imagination, stimulated by such reading, raised up around him during his early years, that he escaped much of the unhappiness which as a sensitive child would have been felt by him, as things grew worse at home under the persistent ill-fortune which persecuted his father.

Apart, however, from increasing financial embarrassments, the Daudet family had within it all the elements of happiness. One has but to listen to Ernest Daudet's account of certain family gatherings at the house of Monsieur Reynaud, the father of Madame Daudet. The other grandfather, by the way, appears to have been less generous. 'Rigorously economical all through life, his generosity towards his grandsons never exceeded a box of peppermint lozenges, which he used to stuff into our pockets on New Year's Day, after we had wished him the compliments of the season.'

But very different was the other grandfather, old M. Reynaud, whose only pleasure in life consisted in making his grandsons happy, so as to enjoy their surprise and their emotion. Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, and Twelfth Night were so many pretexts for feasts and presents.

'Oh, what a memory,' cries Ernest Daudet, 'the New Year's Days of our childhood! The family gatherings at grandfather's house at noon for dinner; the fable, learned with so much difficulty, stammered forth by our impatient lips, whilst our eyes kept wandering in the direction of a large buffet laden with dainties and toys, dancing puppets, accordions, rocking-horses, sheep, dolls, and everything else that one can think of; the distribution of these presents amid the tumult of our violently excited desires; the repast, composed of exquisite delicacies —*croustades* made by old Sophia, *brandade* from Cadet's, *estevenon* cakes from Villaret's, *nougats* from Barthélemy's, sugar dolls, Christmas crackers; and then our dances in the large blue drawing-room, which was only opened on such occasions, whilst our relations continued to talk amongst themselves.'

In the year 1848, that is to say, when Alphonse Daudet was about eight years old, Vincent Daudet's fortune, which during the two previous years had been badly shaken, was gravely compromised, first

by the successive failures of several important debtors, and next by the commercial crisis and cessation of all business which were the natural and inevitable result of the Revolution of that year.

In 'Le Petit Chose' Daudet thus describes the effect that these disasters produced upon his father: 'Suddenly M. Eysette became terrible; as a rule, his was a violent, an inflammatory, an exaggerated nature, fond of shouting, of smashing, and of thunderous outbursts; at the bottom, he was a very excellent man, only quick with his hands in correcting faults, loud in his speech, and actuated by an imperative desire to throw all around him into a tremble. Evil fortune, instead of cowing him, exasperated him. From morning till night his was a formidable anger, which, not knowing on whom to pour itself out, attacked everybody and everything—the sun, the mistral, James, old Annou, the Revolution—oh, above all, the Revolution! Listening to my father, you would have sworn that this 18— Revolution, which had ruined us, had been specially directed against us. Accordingly, I need hardly tell you the revolutionaries were not in the odour of sanctity in the Eysette family. God knows all we said about them at that time.'

To make matters worse, it was in this year that M. Reynaud, Vincent Daudet's father-in-law, died,

leaving none of the fortune on which Vincent and his wife had counted to stem the tide of bankruptcy which was beginning to invade their house. Madame Daudet's brothers, it then transpired, had embarked the whole of their father's assets in speculations of the wildest kind. Not a franc of the estate could be realized, and Madame Vincent Daudet received nothing. This great disappointment greatly embittered her husband, and brought dissension into the family. He at first determined to sue his brothers-in-law, and though he abandoned this project, he always refused to be reconciled to any one of them. When Madame Daudet tried to bring about a better understanding between him and her family, he used to fly into a violent passion and, like M. Eysette, 'throw all around him into a tremble.' Even the optimist Ernest cannot but paint the situation at home in black colours, and here he is in accordance with Alphonse when he says that his childhood was a most unhappy one. He says that the death of M. Reynaud was the starting-point of long and deep family dissensions. 'A black sorrow floated over our house. Our dear mother's eyes were never dry. Under the influence of his cares, my father had become sensitive, irritable.'

The immediate result of this loss of fortune was that expenses had to be reduced all round. Ernest

was taken away from the school at which he was studying and put to a less expensive establishment. Alphonse was kept on at a small preparatory school, known as the Canivet Institution, where he was beginning to learn Latin—a study in which he took great delight, and to which he always, in consequence, applied himself with great industry. He became a good Latin scholar, and retained his knowledge of the language, so that when he became a father and his son Léon was at school, he was able to help him in his studies, going over all his Latin books with him. His favourite Latin author was Tacitus, who, he considers, has had a great influence on French literature since Chateaubriand. He disliked Cicero, but that is probably because Cicero was a politician, and Daudet all his life has disliked and despised both politics and politicians.

Both Ernest and Alphonse Daudet acknowledge a debt of deep gratitude to their father for continuing their education in spite of his reverses and his necessity of practising the strictest economy. A cousin of his, a man of sound common-sense, as he considered himself, with that habit of giving advice to poor relations which is a characteristic of people who have prospered in the world, was constantly urging him to put his boys to a trade. Nothing, he opined, was better for a lad than to know some

kind of manual labour, and he qualified Vincent Daudet's firm resolution to give his sons, since he could give them no fortune, at least a sound education, as foolish pride. It was all the more courageous on Vincent's part to refuse to listen to this advice that he was deeply indebted to this rich cousin, and ran great risks in offending him. Fortunately for French literature, neither Ernest nor Alphonse was put to a trade, and it was in other respects only that the expenses of the Daudets' household were reduced. To begin with, the pleasant apartment in the Maison Vallongue was given up and the family removed to the father's factory on the Avignon road—so elaborately described in the first chapter of 'Le Petit Chose'—a factory which, with its empty workrooms, smokeless chimneys, and motionless machinery, was a very emblem of what had lived and was dead. Apart from this, it was a comfortable home, with large rooms, spacious and airy, the very place for boys to play in, with its large, deserted courtyards and untenanted workshops, its curious and attractive steam-engine, and the vast garden running wild under the lilacs and the fig-trees. Into this desolation, then, was suddenly let loose a band of merry children, the Daudets and their cousins, breaking the silence of the vacant and lifeless factory with their peals of laughter, their

Provençal songs, and the sound of their hurrying and restless feet.

It was in this house that the family was increased by the birth of a little girl, to-day Madame Allard, and by the arrival of one of the uncles from Lyons, who came to live with the Daudets. His intention was to direct the factory, and the dyeing-rooms in particular, as soon as work was resumed. In the meanwhile he spent his time in amusing himself with his paint-box, colouring the engravings in a collection of volumes which he had brought with him. When all these books were coloured he exercised his taste and his paint-box on anything that fell into his hands. There was long shown in the Daudet family a Spanish grammar which had been illustrated in colours by this old gentleman. He was particularly fond of his nephew Alphonse, whose games he often shared, whose peccadilloes he hid from the paternal anger. Alphonse has pourtrayed him in ' Le Nabab ' in the person of the cashier of La Caisse Territoriale. His artistic instincts have been transmitted through his nephew, Alphonse, to his grand-nephew, Lucien Daudet, who shows a decided taste for the paint-box and all its works, and is to be the painter of the family.

The Daudets were not to remain long in this house, for after the elections of 1848 the factory,

doomed to eternal inactivity, was sold to the Carmelites. Alphonse Daudet has related his feelings as a child on losing so magnificent a playground in 'Le Petit Chose': 'It was a terrible blow. It seemed to me as if the heavens were falling in. The factory sold! Yes, and what about my desert island, my caves and huts? Alas! island, caves, and huts, all had been sold, all had to be quitted. My God, how I cried! I had no more any heart in my play, as well you may think; oh, none at all! . . . I used to go and sit down in every corner, and looking at the objects around me, used to speak to them as though they were living persons; I used to say to the plane-trees: "Farewell, my dear friends!" and to the fountain-basins: "All is over—we shall never meet again."'

On leaving the factory, Vincent Daudet installed his family in a small apartment in the Rue Seguier, and went off to Lyons to take a place as employé in a commercial house. There was a garden attached to the house in the Rue Seguier, with trees and flowers and a deserted conservatory; but in spite of this, and of the fact that the landlady's little girl was only too ready to play the part of the faithful Friday, or of a crew of mutineers, or of a tribe of infuriated savages, Alphonse had lost his taste for games, in which he was forced to draw upon his imagination,

and seemed to prefer the noisy sports of his comrades at the Canivet school. Doubtless his imagination needed to lie fallow for awhile, whilst the active little body, tingling with health, cried out for its share of amusement. He became fond of playing off practical jokes on others, and he and his comrades on one famous occasion very nearly caused the death of one of their victims, a solitary old man who lived in a mysterious manner in a house which was always shut up. Alphonse and his friends used to ring the old man's bell every evening as they returned from school, and then run away, as boys have done since there were boys, and bells to ring. But the victim in this case was a man of limited patience, and one night ambushed himself, falling upon them in fury in the very act of annoyance. They were able to make good their escape in great terror, though hotly pursued, and took refuge in Alphonse Daudet's home. Their pursuer, mistaking his way in the dark, fell down a flight of stairs into a coal-cellar and nearly broke his neck.

It was shortly after this incident, in the spring of 1849, that the Daudets left Nîmes for Lyons to rejoin their father. Madame Daudet separated from her family and birthplace in tears; the boys, on the other hand, were pleased at the prospect of a change. Alphonse, in particular, was delighted at the thought

of the voyage on a steamer from Valence to Lyons, the realization in part of his long-cherished desire for a life on the water. 'I dare say,' he said to the writer in speaking of his youth, 'that it was from my love of the water that I felt quite happy when I left Nîmes for Lyons, because I there saw water and boats, and it was in some ways a realization of my longings.' Yet at heart he dearly loved his native Provence, and has retained his affection for it all his life, in spite of nearly forty years of Paris. It is interesting to hear him talk of Nîmes, that country of monuments, where he played at marbles in the ruins of the temple of Diana, and raced with his little comrades in the devastated Roman arena; of Provence, the beautiful country of which he says that he is proud of his relation to it, with its patois *gros en escompette;* of the Nîmois in particular, and the Provençals in general, who may be divided into two classes—the Huguenots and the Catholics, the former typified in Guizot, laughing, when they laugh, *en long*, that is to say, from nose to chin; the latter represented by Thiers, the Catholic South, which laughs *en large*, from ear to ear; living side by side, but distinct and different always, their smouldering resentments often breaking out, so that even the children will fight amongst themselves in Homeric battles with stones, as described in 'Les

ALPHONSE DAUDET IN THE PAVILION.

*To face page 43.*

Rois en Exil.'* There is to this day to be seen on Alphonse Daudet's forehead a cicatrice, which he received in one of these fights from a Huguenot stone. He is a great admirer of his own people, the Provençaux, whom he considers as largely of Moorish extraction, a circumstance from which he has drawn much of the humour of his books, and notably of his Tartarin series. It is funny, he considers, to hear of men with bushy black hair and flaring eyes, having all the appearance of bandits or wild warriors, men of exuberant natures and the most excited verbosity, who are, the one a peaceful baker, the other the least offensive and mildest of apothecaries.

* The reminiscences of Elysée Meraut in 'Les Rois en Exil' are those of Alphonse Daudet, for Elysée Meraut is Alphonse Daudet. Describing his childhood in this book, he writes: '. . . He was allowed a little of that good liberty which is so necessary to childhood, a liberty which he employed in running about the *enclos* all day long, and in battling on the mound on which the windmills stood, whites against reds, Catholics against Huguenots. For these hatreds still survive in this part of Languedoc. The children used to divide themselves into two camps, each choosing a windmill, the crumbling masonry of which served them for ammunition; then a crossfire of invectives broke out, the slings began to hiss, and for hours together Homeric fights were fought, invariably ending in a tragic manner with some bleeding cut on the forehead of some lad of ten years old, or in the tangle of some head of silken hair, one of those wounds received in childhood which leave a lifelong mark on the tender skin, a wound like those which Elysée, arrived at man's estate, still showed on his temple and at the corner of his mouth.'

'Oh, my childhood!' exclaims Alphonse Daudet, writing about this journey to Lyons, 'what an impression you have left upon me. It seems to me that it was only yesterday that this voyage on the Rhone took place. I can still see the steamship, its passengers, its crew, and hear the sound of the wheels and the whistle of the engine.'

The voyage lasted three days. Alphonse spent the whole of his time on deck in the bows, feasting his eyes on the expanse of water, which between Valence and Lyons is in places so great that the banks of the Rhone can barely be descried, though not great enough for the lad's immense desire. 'I, for my part, would have liked the expanse to be larger still, to be that which has the name of "Sea."' When some little island in the river was passed by, the lad's heart would beat with excitement. Here was the desert island of his dreams. How delightful it would be to live there, a Robinson Crusoe of the Rhone, with no company but a parrot, till in due time a Friday should come upon the scene, and a tribe of savages should not be wanting. It may almost be believed that for such a life he would at that time have left his brother and sister and the pale and fragile little woman in black, who was sitting in the cabin with tearful eyes, and a heart which throbbed as each turn of the paddle-wheels

removed her still further away from her beloved home. Yet Alphonse was very fond of his mother, and it is a pleasant thing to-day to hear him speak with infinite pity of the dolorous mother that she was. 'I shall never agree with those who deny the comfort of religion,' he said in conversation with the writer, 'for I can never forget of what solace it was to my poor mother when I was a child. At home she was often in tears, and always in distress and sorrow, and anxiety used to distort her beautiful face. But when she went to church, and took me with her, holding her hand, even on the threshold an expression of peace would spread itself over her face. I always used to look up into her countenance as we passed through the swinging doors, for the change was so marked and so miraculous. All the lines of pain seemed to efface themselves, the drawn lips relaxed, her step became lighter, a joyousness invaded her whole frail person, her eyes unveiled themselves and became bright, and the two hours which she used to spend in the church were two hours of happiness, the only happiness she knew.'

The removal to Lyons was not to bring any change for the better to the Daudet family. On the contrary, it was the commencement of a fresh series of misfortunes. Apart from this, these Provençaux suffered greatly under this transplantation from the

15437

glaring sun and intense white light of the vivid South, with all its colour and exuberant vitality. Alphonse describes his impressions of Lyons in the following terms: 'I remember a low-hanging, soot-coloured sky, an unceasing mist rising from the two rivers. It does not rain, it drizzles; and cloyed by the mugginess of the atmosphere, the walls weep, damp oozes from the pavement, the balusters of the staircases cling to the fingers. The appearance of the inhabitants, their gait, their way of speaking, all manifest the dampness of the air.'

This dampness seems to have entered the very organism of the once cheerful Ernest, who, from the optimist lad that he was, gradually changed into the tearful boy whom Alphonse has described with such tender humour in his 'Le Petit Chose.' 'There was developed in me,' writes Ernest, 'a morbid sensitiveness, the germ of which I had inherited from my mother. I used to cry for any and every thing, for the slightest reproach, for a question which it puzzled me to answer. Nobody could understand this characteristic of mine. I did not understand it myself, and I should have been sorely perplexed to explain the reason of my tears.'

'A strange child, my brother Jacques,' writes Alphonse about Ernest. 'There was one who had the gift of tears. As far back as my memory goes,

I see him with red eyes and streaming cheeks. In the evening, in the morning, by day, by night, in the class-room, at home, when out walking, he used to weep unceasingly ; he used to weep in every place. If one asked him, "What is the matter with you?" he would answer through his sobs, "There's nothing the matter with me." And the strangest thing about it was, that there really was nothing the matter with him. He used to weep as people use their handkerchiefs, only oftener, that is all. Sometimes M. Eysette, exasperated, would say to my mother: "That child is ridiculous! Look at him! . . . He is a real torrent." To which Madame Eysette used to answer in her soft voice: "Never mind, my dear ; he will grow out of it. I was like him at his age." In the meanwhile Jacques grew, grew greatly, in fact, but did not grow out of it. On the contrary, this strange boy's singular faculty for shedding torrents of tears without any provocation or reason increased every day.'

On landing at Lyons the children were met by their father. Of what necessity the strictest economy had become is shown by the fact that, tired as they all were by the long journey, they had to walk from the quay to their new home. This was a damp and sombre apartment on the fourth floor of an old house in the Rue Lafont, with a sticky staircase and

a courtyard which resembled a well. The house-porter was a cobbler, and had his workshop in a kind of black hole behind the pump. The kitchen was full of blackbeetles, which swarmed out of the sink, and the first evening was spent by the lads and the old servant who had followed them in their exile from the land of the sun in a Homeric battle against these nauseous insects. Alphonse says that this circumstance alone sufficed to disgust him utterly with Lyons. There were, however, many other reasons in the life in Lyons why, by contrast, the Daudets were constantly regretting their native Provence. Everything was different and unusual. Instead of the large, long loaves on which at table it was so easy to make with the point of the knife that sign of the cross without which few Southerners care to break their bread, they found at Lyons nothing but round *couronnes*, or wreaths of bread, of a form so unfamiliar as to divest the loaf of that interest, almost rising to affection, with which children regard one of the first things which they know as good.

Again, at all the shops their Provençal accent, the Southern names they gave to things, made the shopkeepers laugh at them. Alphonse describes the contempt with which a Lyons butcher asked their old cook what she meant by a *carbonade*—the

meat for a hash or stew—a term unknown in Lyons, yet familiar in the South, and also in Flanders, where a *carbonade de bœuf* is a favourite dish.

But it was home-sickness that afflicted them most of all, an intense longing for the South, with its colour, its brightness, and its sun. It is said that of all people the Swiss most suffer, when away from their country, from the 'woe for home'; and it is related that certain Swiss prisoners, reminded of the Alps by a familiar tune, once risked their lives in a wild dash for liberty. But it is certain that the Southern Frenchman finds it very difficult to acclimatize himself in any district, even in France, which is not his own flaring, scorching land, with its maize-fields and vineyards, its pine-forests and cork-trees, and the long, white, dusty roads. No more clannish people are to be found in Paris than the 'people of the South'; no patois is anywhere more religiously preserved than theirs; and into the capital of the most refined gastronomy they have introduced, and on its kitchens they have imposed, their barbarous dishes, greasy with oil, pestiferous with garlic.

The Daudets suffered bitterly in the dank and foggy air of the great Rhone-side manufacturing city. On Sundays the children used to walk out with their mother and the old servant on the quays, and always, as by instinct, turned in a southerly

direction, because, as their mother used to say, that seemed to bring them nearer home.

'These family walks were doleful,' says Alphonse. 'Father scolded, Ernest cried all the time. As for me, I always lagged behind—for what reason I do not know; I was ashamed to be out-of-doors, no doubt because we were poor.'

The first to give in to this feeling of home-sickness was Annette, the old servant, whose health suffered so seriously from the fogs of Lyons that she had to be sent home, though greatly against her will, for she was devoted to Madame Daudet. 'We had to put her into the train by force,' says Alphonse.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SCHOOLDAYS IN LYONS.

After the enforced loss of their old and faithful servant, the Daudets for sake of economy dispensed with any domestic assistance, a retrenchment which seemed to Alphonse the climax of poverty and wretchedness. The rough work was done by the wife of the cobbler-porter, and as to the rest of the household drudgery, it was valiantly performed by Madame Daudet, who at the call of duty, like the noble, leal-hearted woman that she was, shook off the imaginary dreamland which had enshrouded her, and with tucked-up sleeves and apron-covered form courageously faced the most sordid tasks of life. The kitchen fire spoiled her olive complexion; the sink waters roughened her delicate white hands; and, taken up with keen scrutiny of butchers' and bakers' bills, she had no leisure for other reading. Her romances had to be laid aside, the realities of life had to be faced.

Ernest used to help her in the housekeeping. It was he who used to go to market and purchase the provisions, which he would bring home in a little basket. In the meantime Alphonse was following the bent of his imagination, and so it has been with these two brothers throughout life. Ernest, the laborious, has worked hard all his life, but in a market-going, provision-home-bringing fashion; whilst Alphonse, less laborious, following the bent of his imagination, untrammelled by any Martha-like sense of activity, has won the better prize.

Some months after the arrival of the family in Lyons, Ernest and Alphonse, on the representations of their elder brother Henry, were placed as pupils at the monastic school of St. Pierre. Alphonse was at that time about ten years old. Their father being unable to pay any fees for their instruction, they were admitted as sizars, and it was part of their duty to assist in chapel as choir-boys, a duty which, no doubt, in remembrance of their games in Nîmes, they enjoyed to a certain extent. In exchange for these services they were admitted without charge to the Latin and Greek classes. Apparently, however, the instruction gained was of the most superficial kind, all their time being taken up with their religious exercises. Ernest relates that during this period he was most unhappy, and, tearful as he was

and had been, never, in his opinion, cried so much as then.

'I was so clumsy,' he says, 'I never could learn how to serve at Mass, and one day when I was all alone I got so muddled that I rang the *Sanctus* at the Gospel, throwing all the faithful into the greatest confusion.'

Here, again, the contrast between the two brothers forces itself on the attention. Whilst Ernest never cried so much as during his period of service at the *manécanterie*, Alphonse found the life there 'very amusing.'

'Instead of cramming our heads with Greek and Latin, as in other schools, we were taught to assist the priest at Mass in the central and side aisles, to chant the anthems, to bend the knee, to swing the censers with elegance, which is a matter of great difficulty. It is true that now and again in the course of the day some time was given to declensions and the Epitome, but these were only accessories. Before anything else we were there for the service of the church. At least once a week the Abbé would say to us, between two pinches of snuff, and in a solemn voice: "To-morrow, gentlemen, there will be no school in the morning. We have to attend a funeral."'

Ernest, it may be presumed, used to weep

copiously at this dismal announcement. As to Alphonse: 'We had to attend a funeral. What happiness! Then there were christenings, marriages, a visit from my lord the Bishop, the Viaticum to be carried to a sick person. Oh, the Viaticum, how proud one was to be able to accompany it! . . . Under a little canopy of red velvet walked the priest, carrying the Host and the sacred oils. Two choir-boys carried the canopy, two others escorted it with large gilt lanterns. A fifth preceded it, ringing a little bell; this usually was my function. As the Viaticum passed by, the men uncovered themselves, the women made the sign of the cross. When we passed before a military post, the sentry used to cry out: "To arms!" and the soldiers would run out and form themselves in line. "Present arms!" the officer used to cry. The rifles clattered, the drummer beat a salute. I rang my little bell thrice, as at the *Sanctus*, and on we went.

'Each of us had a complete ecclesiastical outfit in a little cupboard—a black cassock with a long train, an alb, a surplice with wide sleeves stiffened with starch, black silk stockings, two calottes (one of cloth and the other of velvet), neckbands trimmed with little white beads, all that was necessary. It appears that this costume suited me very well. "One could eat him like that," my mother used to

say. Unfortunately, I was very small, and that filled me with despair. Imagine that, even when standing on tiptoe, I did not reach higher than the white stockings of our beadle; and then I was so weak. One day at Mass, whilst changing the Gospels, the big book was so heavy that it dragged me down with it. I fell full length on the steps of the altar. The reading-desk was broken and the service was interrupted. It was a Pentecost day. What a scandal! Apart from these small drawbacks occasioned by my small stature, I was very satisfied with my lot, and often in the evening when going to bed my brother and I would say to each other: "After all, life at the *manécanterie* is very amusing."'

Alphonse, it must be recorded, used to contribute to the excitements to be found in this theatrical life, so apt to please an imaginative colour-loving Meridional, and here also followed the bent of his will and of his fancy. He was an undisciplined child, fond of the wildest pranks. One day he dug out a mine under the cupboards in which the choir-boys kept their vestments, charged it with gunpowder, and set fire to it. There was a terrific explosion, but no harm was done.

When not engaged at school the boys used to make long excursions in the neighbourhood of Lyons,

which at that time still had a certain charm of natural beauty. There were the Charpennes, the Tête d'Or, the woods of La Pape, which to-day have long since vanished before the all-pervading railway. These rustic and sylvan sites were most delightful to the little Southerners, who knew Nature only in her parched and arid aspects, and, indeed, they revelled in the tender green of the woods and meadows with all the freshness of their running waters. There was here the wherewithal to slake the thirst of their fevered imaginations; it was here that there germinated in the mind of Alphonse Daudet that love for the country which to-day makes him find the winter spent in his Paris apartment all too long, and pine for the first fine days which shall allow him to return with all his family to his beautiful country home on the banks of the Seine at Champrosay.

Finding that his sons were not making any progress at the monastic school, and firm in his determination to endow them at least with a good education, Vincent Daudet at last removed them from the *manécanterie* and placed them at the Lyons Lycée, where, after a preliminary examination, they were admitted, Ernest to the fifth and Alphonse to the sixth class. Neither was destined to finish his studies there, and this is perhaps a

fortunate thing for French literature, for, indeed, it is difficult to imagine an educational system more calculated to crush out all individuality, to mould in one mould, to impose prejudices in the matter of taste, and mere uniformity in the matter of style, to rob of all audacity in conception and originality in realization of conceptions, than that of the French Lycée. Manliness, initiative, independence are by this system treated as so many pernicious weeds, to be weeded out with a firm and unrelenting hand, and the fact remains that by far the larger number of contemporary Frenchmen who have distinguished themselves in after-life are men who, from a Lycée point of view, were failures in their youth. Take one example only, that of Emile Zola. Was not this most successful man of letters considered by his masters as hopeless, and did he not fail to secure even the bachelorship which is the young Frenchman's indispensable passport to a position of any kind?

The Daudets began their life at the Lyons Lycée under very unfavourable circumstances. Being poor children, they were dressed in blouses, a costume worn by children of all degrees in Nîmes, but in Lyons only by the 'gones,' as the Lyons schoolboys called them—'the cads,' as the generous English schoolboy would style them. Ernest describes the

feeling of shame with which he and his brother first entered the vast playground of their new school, and how the other lads crowded round them jibing and mocking at their strange attire, as only children can. 'We were at once classified amongst the poor devils whose parents bleed themselves at every vein in order to pay the expenses of their education. The most elegant of our comrades disdained to associate with the newcomers, and affected towards us haughty or patronizing manners. A little later we were fitted with less humiliating costumes, but the effect had been produced and the impression remained.'

As to Alphonse, he describes his first impressions of school-life at Lyons Lycée as follows: 'What struck me first of all on my arrival at the school was that I was the only boy who wore a blouse. At Lyons the sons of rich people do not wear blouses; these are only worn by the street-children, the "gones" as they were called. I had a blouse, a little chequered blouse, which dated from the factory. I wore a blouse, and looked like a "gone." When I entered the class-room the boys laughed, and said: "I say, he's got a blouse!" The professor made a grimace, and at once took a dislike to me. After that, whenever he spoke to me, it was with the tip of his lips and with a contemptuous

air. He never used to call me by my name. He would always say: "Hullo, you there, little What's-your-name."'

Little What's-your-name, however, very soon distinguished himself above his better-dressed comrades. He was a good lad, and seeing what was the state of things at home, set to work with energy to do his best towards remedying the present in the future. He worked very hard indeed, but then, as now, intermittently. And as to-day Alphonse Daudet will keep aloof for months together from his work-table, whilst others, like Zola, are working steadily day by day, so at that time also, after the first few weeks at the school, the little Daudet used to truant. For years together he used to absent himself sometimes as often as three or four times a week from the class-room, but never from the composition class. In spite of this habit he was always at the head of his form, and was considered by all his masters as a lad of the highest promise.

By the time he had reached the third form he had developed a very pretty style of versification, in which he was so apt that when the subject of an essay was set he would write it, not in prose, but in verse. One of these poetical compositions was highly praised in the class by his professor. The subject was 'The Praise of Homer,' which Alphonse

treated in the form of an ode, of which only the last few lines have survived. As a specimen of Daudet's poetic quality at that early age they may be reproduced here:

'. . . Et dans quatre mille ans
Au milieu des tombeaux et des peuples croulants
Comme un sphinx endormi, colosse fait de pierre,
Tu pourras soulever lentement ta paupière,
Regarder le chaos et dire avec orgeuil:
Au vieil Homère il faut un monde pour cercueil.'

Good verses these for a lad of thirteen years of age.

Ernest gives another specimen of his brother's poetical production at this early period of his life. It is a fragment of a romantic piece of verse, which was written during the lesson in a kind of cryptogram to avoid its being read by the schoolmaster. It may be quoted:

'Rito, beau capitaine au service du doge,
Etait un gai luron, l'œil bleu, le poil blondin
Qui lorgnait gentiment une belle dans sa loge,
Et qui portait toujours des gants en peau de daim
Mainte fois, il avait tiré l'épée, et même
Il avait fait, dit-on, gras pendant le carême.
Dieu sait si les maris le redoutaient. Rito
Leur rendait fort souvent visite incognito.'

The composition of these verses is fair; the subject, considering that it is treated by a lad of thirteen, is deplorable. It is, however, a very good example of

what is the constant preoccupation of most lads at a French Lycée, who, at an age when most English boys—thanks to the English system of education—are in pure ignorance of what is evil, are well aware of things which for every reason they should ignore. In Daudet's case this precocious knowledge of the evil of life has produced no bad effects; but what about the hundreds of unchildlike elves whom one sees on Sunday afternoons in the streets of Paris or in the *brasseries* of the Latin Quarter, leering like dissolute old men, with the last tinge of freshness faded from their faces as it has from their souls?

While playing truant Alphonse was protected by his brother Ernest, who, when the headmaster sent in reports of his brother's absence to M. Daudet, used to intercept them, and answer them in his father's name in such a way that the younger boy escaped scathless. Each time that he had committed one of these innocent forgeries on his brother's behalf, Ernest would give Alphonse a lecture, and Alphonse would promise never to do it again. But, as Ernest says, he was always doing it again. He had got into the habit of a life of vagabondage, and could not break himself of it.

What did he do during these frequent absences? Ernest has told us this in part; Alphonse has supplemented his story. Alphonse's account of the way

in which he employed the time when he was away from school is interesting as throwing a light on his character as a child. It was told at a dinner at Flaubert's house, when Daudet spoke of his childhood, 'a feverish and troubled childhood, passed in a home where there was no money, with a father who changed his business or profession every day, in the eternal fog of the city of Lyons, already abominated by this young soul enamoured of the sun. Then prolonged reading—he was not twelve years old at the time—the reading of poets, of works of imagination which excited his brain, readings stimulated by the intoxication produced by liquors stolen at home, readings abroad during whole days whilst rowing about in boats which he used to break from their moorings on the quays.'

'And,' adds De Goncourt, who reports this conversation, 'in the burning reverberation of the two streams, intoxicated with reading and with sweetened alcohol—and short-sighted as he was—the child came as in a dream to live through a hallucination, or, in other words, he passed untouched through the reality of things.'

At Lyons, at least, Alphonse was able to indulge in his passion for the water. The boatmen did not profit much by this passion, for, as he himself told Flaubert, he used to take the boats without leave,

as his fancy prompted him to do. And once embarked, there was no thought of home or school left to him, and away he would row, down the Saône or the Rhone, in quest of strange adventures, or trifling incidents which his vivid imagination could transform into adventures worthy to be chronicled by a Defoe.

His brother is of opinion that these excursions, with all the exercise of imagination which they entailed, contributed largely to the development of his extraordinary precocity. 'Unconsciously, he gathered there ineffaceable impressions, thanks to which later on he was able to write stories so penetratingly full of life. He used to come back home pale, exhausted, with haggard face, drunk with the fatigue, with the fresh air, his eyes full of visions of eddying waters.'

Ernest used to wait for him so as to let him in without attracting the attention of their parents, and in a whisper would prime him what to say, and whether his absence had been noticed or not. One day, he relates, Alphonse came home in a sad state. Some vicious comrades had intoxicated him with absinthe, and he could barely stagger along. Ernest was, however, able to put him on his guard, telling him that his father was there, and Alphonse, succeeding in pulling himself together, explained

that he had been detained at school by a visit from the University inspector, and that his appearance was due to the fact that he was dying of hunger.

It is curious, as Ernest points out, that, having run after such pleasures in his youth, having so indulged himself, and having so given way to the numerous temptations with which he was beset, his brother should have lost none of the fineness of his nature, none of his fine intellectual and moral qualities, none of the vivacity of his intelligence, the delicacy of his wit, the freshness of his mind, the flower of his honesty. Almost anyone else, says Ernest, would have been ruined. In his case the test has given results directly contrary to those which one might have been justified in fearing.

Alphonse Daudet's salvation, no doubt, was in his early marriage, and he himself is the first to acknowledge his debt in this respect also to his admirable partner. For as the child had been, so was the young man; but before the ruinous habits had been definitely acquired, and that fatal border-line which separates a curiosity about vice from constitutional viciousness had been crossed, he had the supreme fortune to meet the lady who is now his wife, who, like the Agnes of David Copperfield, has been his guardian angel, protecting him against himself. 'Even after my marriage,' he has told the writer,

'my wildness troubled me still, just as after a storm big waves keep rolling in, although the tempest has ceased. I used to come home at all hours of the night, and from all sorts of places, often in the saddest states, stained with liquor, bleeding from fights in the sorriest stews; and my wife, who knew that at heart I was not bad, just waited and waited, allowing me to feel my conduct without reproaching me, and in the end succeeded in buckling me down.'

How many of the frowzy, middle-aged Bohemians who are constantly to be seen behind piled-up saucers of pots of beer in the tap-rooms of the Latin Quarter drinking-places in Paris, with greasy frock-coats buttoned tightly over indescribable under garments, and shiny, flat-brimmed hats tilted back on heads too early denuded of their hair—men who never have, never will, never can accomplish anything, who spend their lives in drinking and talking, who know no society but that of fellow-tipplers and the forlornest of womankind—might not have been saved, if not for equal glory and fortune, at least to lives of decency and usefulness, if at some time in their lives, ere it was too late and the border-line was crossed, they had met a gentle woman guardian angel, who, becoming wife and friend, had also buckled them down!

In spite of his many escapades and the irregular conduct which has been described, Alphonse appears

never to have been treated with severity by his father, whose temper, soured as it was by unceasing misfortune, seems rather to have vented itself on the scapegoat Ernest. It was Ernest who was always being scolded. It was Ernest whom his father always called 'a donkey,' a circumstance recorded by his brother in the story of his childhood. Indeed, Vincent Daudet seems to have taken pleasure in baiting his second son, as is exemplified by the famous jug scene in 'Le Petit Chose,' one of the few incidents concerning Ernest, depicted as Jacques Eysette, which is taken from actual fact.

'Poor Jacques! he was not happy, he no more than the others. M. Eysette, from constantly seeing him with tears in his eyes, had ended by taking a dislike to him, and used to shower raps down on his head. All day long, one heard, "Jacques, you are a duffer! Jacques, you are a donkey!" The fact of the matter is that when his father was present, Jacques used to lose all his self-control. The efforts which he used to make to restrain his tears rendered him ugly. M. Eysette brought him bad luck. Listen to the jug scene:

'One evening as we were sitting down to table, it was noticed that there was not a drop of water left in the house.

'"If you like, I will go and fetch some," said Jacques, like a good fellow.

'And so saying he takes up the jug, a large stoneware jug.

'M. Eysette shrugs his shoulders.

'"If it's Jacques who is going to fetch it," he said, "the jug is broken. That's quite sure."

'"Do you hear, Jacques?" says Madame Eysette in her quiet voice—"do you hear? Don't break it; be very careful."

'"Oh, it's no use your telling him not to break it; he will break it all the same."

'Here Jacques in his tearful voice:

'"But, come, why do you insist on my breaking it?"

'"I don't insist on your breaking it. I tell you that you will break it," replies M. Eysette, in a tone which admits of no answer.

'Jacques makes no reply. He snatches up the jug with a feverish hand and rushes out, as though to imply, "Oh, I shall break it, shall I? Well, we shall see."

'Five minutes, ten minutes elapse. Jacques does not return. Madame Eysette begins to become anxious.

'"I only hope nothing has happened to him!"

'"What do you suppose can have happened to

him?" says M. Eysette in a gruff voice. "He has broken the jug, and does not dare come back."

'But whilst so speaking—for, with all his gruffness, he is the best man in the world—he rises and goes to open the door to see what has become of Jacques. He has not far to go. Jacques is standing on the landing, behind the door, empty-handed, stricken dumb, petrified! On seeing M. Eysette he turns pale, and, in a heart-rending and feeble voice—oh, what a feeble voice!—he says:

'"I have broken it."

'He had broken it.

'"In the archives of the Eysette family, we call that "the jug scene."'

His comrades, no doubt, found young Alphonse Daudet too turbulent, too independent, and too audacious. A certain prejudice may also have existed against the lad, who at first had come to the school in a blouse, but, instead of ordering himself lowly and reverently before his betters in cloth jackets and gold-trimmed tunics, was winning all the masters' praises and distinction far above the heads of all his fellows. However it may be, Alphonse made very few friends, and only one whose friendship lasted into later life. This was a lad called Garrison, whom Daudet has described to the writer as a man of the most extraordinary

inconsequentiality, such a man, doubtless, as would be known amongst us as 'a casual fellow' in our odd modern slang. Garrison often used to accompany Daudet on his adventurous expeditions on the Saône, and it was certainly fortunate that he did so, for the young poet was much too short-sighted to manage a boat properly, and when out alone was more than once in imminent danger of being capsized by the river steamers. With Garrison at the helm this danger was averted, and poor motherly Ernest, who was always quaking at home in anxiety for his beloved little scapegrace of a brother, expecting any hour to hear that he had been drowned in the river, or had had his brains beaten out by a paddle-wheel, could be at rest, whilst Alphonse could undisturbedly row ahead singing his sailor songs, or astounding the old peasant-women washing on the banks of the Saône with vigorous recitations from the poems with which his head was filled.

After leaving the Lycée at Lyons Daudet quite lost sight of the 'casual' Garrison, and it was only quite recently that the latter called on him in Paris under the stress of necessity. Daudet then learned that Garrison had been living in Paris almost as long as himself, but had never ventured to come near his old school-mate, who had become

'a somebody.' He was silent at first about himself, but, being pressed by Daudet, told him that he was in business in a small street near La Roquette prison, engaged in the manufacture of dolls' boots; that business was very bad, and that he had come to see him in the hope that he would lend him the money to start something else. He also informed him that he was married, and had a son, who was a comic actor at the Beaumarchais Theatre. It is quite certain that Daudet, although he does not say so, helped the manufacturer of dolls' boots to do something else, and put in a word with one of his numerous friends amongst the theatrical managers of Paris on behalf of his son, the comic actor.

A curious psychological fact, which is connected with Alphonse Daudet's schooldays, is that though he has long since almost entirely forgotten the faces, and even the names, of his schoolmates, he to this day remembers the handwriting of each one of them. Often, in his nights of fever, lying awake, he sees, as in hieroglyphics upon a huge wall, the writings of all those boys, and passes hours, as it seems to him, in attributing each varied piece of penmanship to its author.

The life of the Daudet family in Lyons, as has been mentioned above, was a succession of disasters. Step by step they went lower down in

poverty. The day came when they could no longer afford even the gloomy apartment on the fourth-floor of the house in the Rue Lafont, and were forced to move once more—this time to a second-floor flat in an old house in the Rue Pas-Etroit, near the Lycée, a badly-paved street which led out on to the foggy quays of the Rhone. This apartment was large and convenient, and let at a very low rent on account of the miserable appearance of the broken-down old house. The rooms were sombre, for the towering walls of the Lycée kept out the light; the staircase was dark and damp. Whenever the Rhone overflowed, the Rue Pas-Etroit was inundated and there was more than three feet of water in the Daudets' house, so that its inhabitants could only travel abroad in boats. This no doubt delighted the water-loving, adventurous Alphonse, who at that time, it must be said, was in the full of his 'Flegel-Jahre,' as the Germans call it; a youth fond of practical jokes, as when one day he sent a score of pastrycooks, bearing vol-au-vents, one after another, to the house of a respectable and dignified solicitor, who had ordered no such pastry; a youth frank withal, always ready to take all the blame on his own shoulders, so as to exculpate his mischief-loving comrades.

That every youth must sow his wild oats is of

the wisdom of nations, and in every male life there must be a period of the kind which the Germans call 'Flegel-Jahre.' As indispensable for the proper moral development of a man is this early outbreak of moral maladies, as for his proper physical development are certain indispensable and inevitable sicknesses. It would seem that in the human being the mind equally with the body must in youth cast out in eruptions certain evil intrinsic humours, so that, ridded of them, once and for all, they may proceed untrammelled to their due expansion. And just as the measles clear the blood, so do those moral measles of indiscipline, revolt, republicanism, concupiscence, egotism, gluttony, which affect most young men, after their outbreak, eruption, and discharge, purge the character and the morality, and leave them sweet and clean. With Alphonse Daudet this was certainly the case. The eruption began early, was violent in its symptoms, and lasted a long time, leaving him only all the more sweet and clean, of a purity which has influenced him in all his works, and in one of the corruptest periods of French literature has always distinguished him from the mass of his fellow-writers.

## CHAPTER V.

### EARLY EFFORTS.

THE Daudets were living in their dank and sombre apartment in the Rue Pas-Etroit when the *coup d'état* took place—an occurrence which dealt a final blow to Vincent Daudet's hopes of any change for the better in his lamentable affairs, for Vincent Daudet was a strong Royalist, and had brought up his children in the Royalist tradition. Even when his affairs were at their worst, he used to look forward to the return of the King to set all things right, and even trivial expenses were put off until the happy home-coming of the Frohsdorf exile should have become a fact. 'When the King returns,' he was wont to say, 'I shall buy myself a new armchair.' If Madame Daudet pressed him to change the paper in one of the rooms, he would say: 'Wait till the King comes back.' Circulars from the Royalist committees, headed with the consolatory words 'Fides, Spes,' were constantly being

delivered at his house, and these circulars he would read out aloud to his wife and children after the day's work was done.

'He lived,' writes Alphonse Daudet, speaking about himself, 'in the midst of a Royalist legend, the commemorative dates of which were the feast of St. Henry and January 21; in an atmosphere of veneration for the martyr princes who used to bless the crowd with the hands of bishops, for the intrepid princesses who, mounting on horseback in the good cause, were persecuted, betrayed, and taken by surprise under the black trap-door of some fireplace in an old Brittany mansion. And to render less sad this tale of mourning and exile, too sad for a child's mind, the story of "The Fowl in the Pot" and the song about the "Vert-Galant" were allowed to blend with it glorious souvenirs and all the animation of ancient France. This song of "Le Vert-Galant" was the Marseillaise of the Enclos de Rey. When on Sundays, after vespers, the table having with great difficulty been made to stand straight on the slope of the little garden, the family was dining "in the good of the air," as they say down there, in the stifling atmosphere which follows upon a summer's day . . . when the old burgher began to sing, in a voice which was famous amongst his neighbours, the "Vive Henri Quatre, vive ce

roi vaillant," all was silent around him in the *enclos.* . . . All joined in the chorus :

> ' "A la santé de notre roi,
> C'est un Henri de bon aloi
> Qui fera le bien de toi, de moi."'

One morning, however, Vincent Daudet, like all his fellow-citizens, woke up to find Lyons in a state of siege proclaimed by Marshal de Castellane, commanding the troops at Lyons, the walls covered with Napoleon's famous proclamations, and numerous Republicans, known for their detestation of the policy of the Prince-President, being hurried off under arrest to the various prisons of the town. The unhappy silk-merchant was all the more distressed at the turn which affairs had taken that only a few months previously, whilst on a visit to Paris on business, he had been presented to the leaders of the Royalist party, and that one of these gentlemen, known to hold full powers from his Majesty at Frohsdorf, had assured him that his services to the cause and the traditional loyalty of his family were not forgotten in a high place, going so far as to note down his name and that of each one of his children, with the promise that when the good time, then within view, should come, the Daudets should not be forgotten—a promise and a hope which no doubt had helped the unfortunate

man to bear up courageously under the persecutions of disaster in the miserable apartment in the Rue Pas-Etroit. More than empty words, indeed, had he received in proof that his interests would be borne in mind when Frohsdorf should be exchanged for the Tuileries, for had not one morning's post brought a sheet of fair paper from the exiled pretender, impressed with the royal seal of three fleurs-de-lys, with the motto 'Fides, Spes,' and bearing the words, 'Given to M. Daudet. HENRI'? The next message that came from the Comte de Chambord was of a much less reassuring character, being an autographic proclamation to the nation, beginning: 'Frenchmen, you are being deceived' —the final confirmation of the fact that though the detested Republic was over and done, it was not the King that had come back.

The little Daudets were of course still too young to appreciate the importance of what had occurred, and both enjoyed the spectacle of the streets of Lyons, with the whispering crowds before the white proclamations, the hurrying policemen, and the soldiers camping about the public places in open-air bivouacs. Large watch-fires were burning at intervals along the quays, the air rang with watch-cries and pass-words and the clatter of weapons, whilst all the bridges were defended with cannon.

The rumour was abroad that a Royalist invasion from Switzerland was being expected, and that the troops were holding themselves in readiness to repel it. The excitable and imaginative Alphonse must have revelled in all this commotion, and no doubt amongst the many who blamed the Prince-President for what he had done few were more severe in their heart of hearts than this youth, who, brought up in the strict Royalist tradition, has remained a Royalist all his life. Alphonse would strain his ears to catch the sound of the advancing troops marching under the white banner, and would hope that they might soon come, and, putting the soldiers of Marshal Castellane to flight, bring with them all those good things which he had been taught to hope for on the King's return—a new armchair for his father, a prettier paper for his mother's room, and for himself and Ernest, no doubt, a great box full of books.

At the same time, whether it was that Vincent Daudet was glad to be rid of the Republic, which had been so disastrous to him, at any price, or that he looked on the *coup d'état* as the first step towards a monarchical re-establishment, or that he deemed it prudent to remain on good terms with the soldiers and the authorities, it is a fact that he allowed his children to carry comforts to the soldiers who were

shivering in the icy fog of their Rhone-side bivouacs. Just at the end of the Rue Pas-Etroit, hard by the Lycée, a detachment of Vincennes chasseurs was encamped, and to these one evening little Alphonse issues forth proudly bearing a huge leg of mutton trimmed with haricot beans, whilst Ernest follows him bearing several bottles of wine, all of which were received by the soldiers with effusive gratitude.

It was, by the way, on this leg of mutton day that the autograph letter from Frohsdorf was delivered in the house of the Rue Pas-Etroit, and it was Ernest who read it out to his parents 'in a trembling voice.' Vincent Daudet was in bed at the time, doubtless entirely broken down with all the adverse things that were happening. As for Madame Daudet, on hearing the doleful prose of the Comte de Chambord, she shed a few tears—'sterile tears' Ernest calls them.

It may be mentioned that Ernest had left school, urged, no doubt, by a desire to be of immediate usefulness to his unfortunate parents, and was at this time already learning the rudiments of commerce. Alphonse refers to this in 'Le Petit Chose,' but modifies the circumstances, for it was by his free-will that 'brother Jacques' had placed himself in apprenticeship with his father, writing commercial letters from M. Daudet's dictation. Alphonse's

pleasantries about 'brother Jacques's' predestination to a life of writing from dictation were founded on fact.

And here it may be remarked that of the two brothers it is the one that always played the Martha *rôle* in youth to whom Fortune has been less kind. An admirable *littérateur*, constantly laborious, erudite, methodical, Trollope-like, the Martha-like Ernest, author of numerous volumes and of innumerable contributions to the periodical press, has never got beyond a certain mediocrity of success. The brighter fame of his brother Alphonse has outshone his own, and a world chary of admiration has, it would seem, not laurels enough for two brothers of the same family. And here, again, the proverbial philosophy of nations would seem at fault, for certainly of two brothers, of whom one rose early and worked late, was regular in his conduct, filial and methodical, and the other was fitful, irregular, fond of strong drink, and repeatedly playing the truant, it is the former who, according to all the ethics of copy-books, should have won the greater prize. But this has not been so, and when the name of Daudet is mentioned in the world's forum it is of Alphonse, not of his laborious brother Ernest, that one thinks,—such is the eternal injustice of things here below. That already at an

early age—for he wrote 'Le Petit Chose' when he was twenty-five—Alphonse was cognisant of this injustice is shown by the fact that in this story 'brother Jacques's' martyrdom is carried to the extreme. To the younger, more brilliant, more fortunate brother, Jacques gives up first his bride and next his life. Doubtless had circumstances exacted these sacrifices Ernest Daudet would have conceded them, and in the history of contemporary men of letters few things are more admirable than this love of an elder brother for his younger and more successful brother and rival. If the statue of Alphonse Daudet is ever raised in any public place—and if the glorification of the writer who was the master of French prose in the last half of the nineteenth century is dear to the heart of the French nation it surely will be raised—then certainly on the pedestal of that statue should stand—on the one hand the figure of Ernest Daudet, and on the other that of the beautiful woman who was Alphonse Daudet's wife, for it is indeed they who have supported him and borne him aloft; it is on their love and devotion that his great fame is founded.

The conduct of Ernest during his father's misfortunes in Lyons was certainly admirable. For a boy of his tastes it must indeed have been a sacrifice to abandon his studies, and, putting aside his pro-

nounced literary tastes, to work in his father's workshop. 'How many hours,' he writes, 'did I not pass there, folding goods, writing letters, drawing up bills, making packing cases! We toiled, my father and I, like two labourers. Except that we did not carry the boxes downstairs on our backs, I do not see what we left for the porter, who acted as our assistant, to do. But neither of us ever thought of complaining; our reward was in the arrival of a customer.'

The goods manufactured by M. Daudet were of excellent quality, and a good business might have been founded had it not been for the absolute want of capital which crippled him in all his enterprises.

'What was lacking was money, the indispensable capital, the possibility of providing for the outlay necessitated by our industry. We were constantly being obliged to reduce our manufacture when, on the contrary, we ought to have increased it. At other times, when with an effort we had succeeded in stocking our shelves with goods, sales would suddenly cease, under the effect of some accidental crisis, and we remained without receipts of any kind, after having exhausted all our resources in the necessary advances.

'What bitter cares were ours, thus tossed about

between bankruptcy and protests for non-payment! And how shall I relate the anguish of the days on which bills fell due? The little notebook on which all our acceptances were inscribed constantly reminded us of our obligations. . . . With heavy hearts we watched these days draw nearer, hoping to be able to meet our engagements through some purchaser who never came. Bills were often presented when we were quite unprepared to meet them. Then two or three hundred pieces of foulard silk would hurriedly be thrown into a box, the porter would hoist the box on to his shoulders, and off we would go to the traders whose sole business it was to turn to their profit the embarrassments of manufacturers in distress. With shame on our faces and fury at heart we would sell them, dirt cheap, enough of our goods to enable us to face the liabilities of the day. There is no possibility of growing rich in a business of that description.'

Often, moreover, this desperate method was of no avail, and a day came when, on an execution order, the *huissiers*, or bailiffs, came to seize the furniture, the last belongings of this unhappy family. It was one morning at seven o'clock. Madame Daudet was ill in bed, Vincent was shaving himself by the window, and Alphonse was seated at the table giving a last look at his lessons before setting

out for school. There were three bailiffs, men in rusty black, with the forbidding physiognomies of their profession.

It was Ernest who saved his family on this occasion. At the sight of these men, and on learning for what purpose they had come, he rushed out of the house and went straight to a rich merchant with whom they had been on friendly terms since their arrival in Lyons. This man was also a friend of the creditor, and he took upon himself to dismiss the bailiffs from the apartment in the Rue Pas-Etroit, interceded on Daudet's behalf, and obtained a respite for him. It was Ernest's good fortune many years later to meet the son of the man who had saved their home at such a critical moment, when he in his turn was in a position where assistance was welcome, so that Ernest was able to pay off the old debt.

Though the furniture was saved on this occasion, matters grew worse and worse at home. Ernest was constantly being sent — another little David Copperfield — to the neighbouring *mont-de-piété* to raise the money necessary for the daily expenses. Madame Daudet's jewels, the silver spoons and forks, were one by one deposited there in pledge. It was a Micawber-like existence, and in this respect, also, a great analogy exists between the early life of the young Daudets and that of Charles

Dickens, so like both in point of appearance and literary technique to Alphonse Daudet.

'Oh, days of black misery, what a furrow you have dug out in our memory, with what precocious maturity you clothed our minds! Yes, from living with adversity we became men at a very early age. One might become so under less trials. A child's mind so soon tempers itself in such hard experiences.'

From visiting the pawnshop, Ernest passed into employment there, being engaged to receive the pledges as they were handed in over the counter. His salary was half a crown a day, which paid for his food at home. His occupation distressed the sensitive child, and remembering the miserable faces that he had seen, and the lamentable manifestations of poverty in the pledges offered, he was able on his return home after the first day in his new employment to comfort his mother by saying: 'There are people who are far more unhappy than we are.' A few months later he obtained better employment, a place as clerk in a forwarding office.

Meanwhile Alphonse was continuing his studies at the Lycée. His progress was so rapid, in spite of his frequent absences from school, that at the age of fifteen he had already nearly finished his humanities. What leisure was left him from his

studies and his wild pleasures was consecrated to literature. A youth of his own age lived in the house in the Rue Pas-Etroit, and this youth spent the whole of his time in writing poetry, which he copied out into a magnificent album, bound in black morocco. The poetry was not in any way remarkable, being but a youthful imitation of Victor Hugo, whose 'Orientales' and 'Odes et Ballades' he knew by heart, nor has the name of the young poet of the Rue Pas-Etroit survived; but one good thing he did,—by his example he stimulated the two young Daudets to imitation, and, it may be, was the first cause which drove them into that career in which both have so distinguished themselves. Alphonse at the age of fifteen had already written one or two poems, which may be read to this day in his collection 'Les Amoureuses.' Ernest, less inspired and more troubled with the perplexities of life, although fired also with literary ambition, never got beyond the first verse of a poem on religion which he had planned out, but never wrote. Alphonse has quoted this verse in 'Le Petit Chose':

'Religion! Religion!
Mot sublime! mystère!
Voix touchante et solitaire.
Compassion! compassion!'

Poor Ernest!

It was natural that the two brothers should wish to collaborate. However, nothing came of their collaboration but the first line of a tragedy in verse, which had been planned out by Ernest after reading Ossian and Ducis:

'Blood, blood everywhere! Each tree, each leaf . . .'

The second line of this most appalling tragedy, the scene of which was laid in Cornwall, was never written, nor have the two brothers ever collaborated since. Ernest felt that verse was not his vocation, and turned his attention to prose, his example being followed by his younger brother, who, however, did not altogether abandon the Muse. The following lines, since published under the title 'La Vierge à la Crèche,' date from this period:

'Dans ses langes blanches, fraichement cousus,
La Vierge berçait son enfant Jésus.
Lui gazouillait comme un nid de mésanges.
Elle le berçait et chantait tout bas
Ce que nous chantons à ces petits anges . . .
Mais l'enfant Jésus ne s'endormait pas.
Etonné, ravi de ce qu'il entend,
Il rit dans sa crèche, et s'en va chantant
Comme un saint lévite et comme un choriste;
Il bat la mesure avec ses deux bras
Et la Sainte Vierge est triste, bien triste,
De voir son Jésus qui ne s'endort pas.'

The young poet had already discovered that there are better and more interesting things in life than the adventures which he had attributed to Rito, the hero of his Venetian poet, and this early comprehension of the beauty and interest of very simple things was distinctly full of promise for the future. In the same mood and at the same time he wrote his poem 'Les Petits Enfants,' which has also since been published. The following are the three first verses of this poem :

'Enfants d'un jour, ô nouveau-nés,
Petites bouches, petits nez,
Petites lèvres demi-closes,
Membres tremblants,
Si frais, si blancs,
Si roses ;

'Enfants d'un jour, ô nouveau-nés,
Pour le bonheur que vous donnez,
A vous voir dormir dans vos langes,
Espoir des nids,
Soyez bénis,
Chers anges.

'Pour tout ce que vous gazouillez,
Soyez bénis, baisés, choyés,
Gais rossignols, blanches fauvettes,
Que d'amoureux
Et que d'heureux
Vous faites.'

There is certainly nothing remarkable about these verses, but they show a modesty in the choice of a

subject, a simplicity of expression, and a recognition of natural beauties which are rarely to be met with in the work of very young poets; and in these respects they strike the keynote of the whole of Alphonse Daudet's work, characterized as it is by a choice of the simplest subjects, treated in the most modest way, and in the clearest and most unpretentious style, that has graced French literature since Lafontaine.

These verses, and many others (of which a few have survived in the pages of 'Les Amoureuses,' while the majority have gone back to the limbo from whence they came), were written in part after solitary walks in the country or rows on the river, in part after the excitement generated by tobacco-smoking, potation, and discussion in a small room which Alphonse and certain of his schoolfellows had hired as their *cænaculum*. It may be supposed that it is the poems which were written after the solitary walks in the country or the excursions on the river that have survived, and that it is those that were generated of tobacco-smoke and liqueur-drinking which have returned to the limbo from whence they came. At least this should be so.

Although Daudet is heard of here and elsewhere as frequenting the society of his schoolfellows, a decided love of solitude was, and has always been, one of his characteristics. At the same time, he is

very fond of society, and on his days of reception is always to be found surrounded by a crowd of people. He considers this love of solitude to be the effect of the reaction from Meridional exuberance, an exuberance which, perhaps, was never more pronounced than in his case. Both De Goncourt and Zola have this love of solitude, though neither is of an exuberant nature. Their master, De Balzac, lived a lonely life for twenty years, and bitterly regretted it. Contempt for humanity and a disbelief in friendship made De Maupassant a solitary man, and led him whither we know, just as it led the unhappy Gerard de Nerval to that iron grating in the sinister Rue de la Vieille-Lanterne. It would be interesting to study from the lives of great men which has more profited to intellectual labour, solitude or sociability. There are famous records of either kind of life, for while we have Molière so desirous of society as to seek out his old cook to keep him company, when in the throes of composition, we have also Schiller double-locking himself in his Gohlis or Weimar hermitages, and Wordsworth stalking, a solitary wanderer, on the hills of Westmorland. In consideration of which, one is induced to believe that human minds are of two sexes—that there are male minds and female minds, and that the latter can only produce and bring forth when brought into contact

with the former. Such a man, a man with a female mind, to whom in solitude no idea ever comes, will, when in the right society, sparkle and coruscate, bringing forth in fertile and unlaborious mental parturition. The society, however, must be the society that is right and requisite ; the female mind must meet its male mate ; for how many a man, reputed by So-and-So a dullard from his silence and sterility in his society, is brilliant and fruitful in the company of Such-and-Such another ?

Alphonse Daudet has greatly distinguished himself in life as a dramatic author, and that play-writing would be amongst the occupations in which he would excel was indicated already in his early youth. It has been seen with what ardour he 'staged' his Robinson Crusoe when quite a child, transforming a factory courtyard into those 'boards which mean the world,' a few shrubs and a fountain-basin into a *mise-en-scène*, enrolling as actors the very *cicades* on the dusty plane-trees, and investing the good dog Lotan with lion-like propensities.

'Everything that we read,' writes Ernest, 'was carried into action, and our minds thus accustomed themselves to absorb and to assimilate everything.'

'Han d'Islande,' the 'Mysteries of Paris,' and the 'Burgraves' were at this time Alphonse Daudet's favourite books ; but any printed volume that came

into his hand was greedily devoured. Nor far from the Rue Pas-Etroit, on the Quai Retz, lived an old bookseller, named Daspet, whose dusty shop was crammed with books of every kind, both antique and modern. 'We used to halt for long hours together at his shop, before the shelves covered with frayed and dusty volumes.' Here the boys would read whatever first came to their hands, good books and bad, novels, books of science, medical treatises, the classics, hurriedly and voraciously, in a manner which for less solid constitutions would have induced grievous mental dyspepsia.

Later on, when Ernest was earning money in his forwarding-office, the lads were able to purchase a few volumes, changing these, when studied, for other books. In this way they acquainted themselves with the beauties of Shakespeare, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, and Ariosto, the elegant flippancies of Piron, the verve and grotesqueness of Pigault-Lebrun, the sentimentality and hyperbole of the Vicomte d'Arlincourt, the epicureanism of Abbé de Chaulieu, and the laboriousness, research, and imaginativeness of Buffon. One author that Alphonse did not read when a youth was Charles Dickens, and this is a fact that must be put on record, for superficial critics have described his work in general, and his novel 'Le Petit Chose' in par-

ticular, as an imitation of, or at least as inspired by, the English writer. The only true comparison which can be made between Charles Dickens and Alphonse Daudet is that in appearance they were not unlike, that Alphonse, like Charles, had a Micawber-like father and youth, and that certain events in the life of the French writer seemed to be the enactment in real life of events imagined and described by the English novelist. 'David Copperfield' was written in 1849-50, when Alphonse was in the full tide of his Micawber experiences. It had been published six years when Mell-like usher experiences came to the young Frenchman. Alphonse Daudet is rather sensitive about criticisms implying plagiarism, and quite recently affirmed to the writer on his word of honour that at the time when he wrote 'Le Petit Chose' he had not read a line of Dickens.

Besides the books mentioned, the two brothers used to receive from a neighbouring lending library volumes of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Revue de Paris*, in which they learned to know Octave Feuillet, Jules Janin, Sainte-Beuve, and that writer who was afterwards to become the friend and admirer of Alphonse Daudet, the incomparable Flaubert.

The cleanliness and sweetness of the writings of both brothers are proof that their early readings did

not affect or soil their minds. One could not imagine a worse study for apprentice *littérateurs* than some of the authors mentioned above, a Piron or a Pigault-Lebrun. Even Buffon, with his deliberate insisting on animality in its basest manifestations, may be considered a pernicious book for inexperienced readers in the age of prurient curiosity.

'What did we not read,' writes Ernest, 'in those far-distant years? In the evening, when everything was at rest around us, a lamp shed its light on our prolonged vigils, placed near the bed which we fraternally shared. Our parents thought that we were asleep; repeatedly from her chamber our mother would call out to us to assure herself that we had put out our light. We took care not to answer her; we held our breath, and turned over the leaves without a sound, and, thanks to our precautions, we freely entered, instead of going to sleep, into the confabulations which little by little engendered the fecundity of our minds.'

The first piece of writing by Alphonse Daudet that was ever published was a poem which appeared, when he was fifteen years of age, in the *Gazette de Lyon*, a Royalist journal, at that time edited by one Theodore Mayery, who, knowing of the attachment of the Daudets to the Legitimist

cause, extended a friendly welcome to the two lads. Ernest contributed a few articles of literary criticism, Alphonse various poems, which have not survived. It was to Mayery of the *Gazette de Lyon*, also, that Alphonse Daudet carried his first novel. This was a story entitled 'Léo et Chrétienne Fleury,' the story of a young soldier who, out of devotion to his family, engaged in an adventure which was considered by his chiefs as a criminal breach of discipline, punished by court-martial, and a duly executed sentence of death. Mayery was most enthusiastic about this story, and refused at first to believe that it could be the work of a lad of fifteen still at school. He agreed to publish it in the *Gazette de Lyon*, and might have done so had not that journal been suppressed by the Imperial police. It is not known what became of the manuscript. It was probably lost by Mayery. Alphonse was too taken up with his troubles to press for its return, and at that age, when labour is so easy and the task so pleasant a one, what does a writer care for one manuscript the more or the less? Was not the delight of writing it its own great reward? Has not one youth and energy to write so many more, so much better books? From what is known of this story, however, it would seem a regrettable fact that Mayery mislaid the manuscript. Ernest relates that on the

evening when his brother read it out aloud to the assembled family everybody burst into tears. It was a story in two parts, the first of which was an exchange of letters between Léo the soldier and Chrétienne, his sister; the second part was narrative.

'All the grace, the wit, the freshness of heart, the originality of style, possessed by Alphonse Daudet,' writes his brother, 'were to be found in this novel. The narrative which formed the second part was impregnated with emotion, scented with a sweet perfume of youth and tenderness.' And again: 'Although since then twenty-five years have passed by, the impression left in my memory of "Léo et Chrétienne Fleury" has remained lively enough to authorize me to say that, had this novel been published, it would in no wise have disfigured my brother's collected works. This fact is worthy of attention. It confirms all that is known about Alphonse Daudet's talent, to whose qualities, when their origin and first manifestations are considered, must be added a rare precocity.'

Ernest also wrote a novel at this time, but, as was always the case with Ernest, it was not read out to the family, the family was not moved to tears, and the editor to whom it was sent, the editor of the *Journal des Bons Exemples*, after the bad example of certain

of his kind, neither acknowledged the manuscript nor returned it. And the same Ernest who remembers his brother's story so well, and comments upon it with such pride and admiration, has 'forgotten all about it, even what its subject was.' And at home nobody believed in Ernest, and no doubt, if he ever spoke of his vocation for letters, both his father and mother would laugh. 'Stick to your figures! stick to your figures!' was what both used to say to him time after time. Alphonse, on the other hand, had plenty of time to practise literature, time taken from his studies or from his leisure moments.

## CHAPTER VI.

### FACING THE WORLD.

When Alphonse Daudet was in his sixteenth year, it became necessary for him to earn his own living. Vincent Daudet's efforts in the Rue Pas-Etroit were the last which this unfortunate man was able to make on behalf of his family. The time came—it was in 1856—when he had to resign himself to abandon commerce altogether, to sell off his stock, and compound as best he could with his creditors. The only result of seven years of unceasing labour was an accumulation of debts, and what remained for the unhappy man who had raised the Daudet family from the blouse of the Cevenol peasant to the frock-coat of burgherdom was to take a place in the service of others, entering a firm of wine-merchants as traveller with an interest in the business. The apartment in the Rue Pas-Etroit was given up, and the family moved to an *entresol* in the Rue Castries. This *entresol* was situated in a pleasant house

between the Place Bellecour and the Perrache Avenue, in one of the brightest, airiest quarters of Lyons, and this circumstance, together with the fact that both the young men were delighted to have turned their backs for good and all on foulards, silks, bills, acceptances, and the other attributes of commerce, contributed to make them in after-life look back on their stay in the Rue Castries, despite their father's ambiguous position, as their happiest time in the dismal and abhorred city of Lyons.

Yet it was in this *entresol* in the Rue Castries that they heard of the death of their brother Henri, the scene so admirably described in 'Le Petit Chose' by Alphonse. Henri, from what Alphonse says and Ernest writes about him, was a remarkable young man, who, if he had lived, would have added still brighter lustre to the name of Daudet.

'His wish had been to enter Holy Orders, and he had begun his ecclesiastical studies at the seminary at Allix. He had remained there only a short time. On the eve of his subdeaconship, at the moment of pronouncing his definite vows, his ailing soul, troubled by the excesses of an unmeasured devotion, had conceived scruples, doubts as to the sincerity of his vocation. He had returned home, much to the annoyance of my father, who could not understand his hesitations.

'During some months he had lived with us, seeking to give piano lessons, occasionally playing the organ in one of the Lyons parishes. At last, tired of this purposeless life, he had left for Nîmes, where Abbé d'Alzon had offered him a place as teacher in the Collège de l'Assomption. I have preserved most of the letters which our poor Henri wrote us at this time. They are full of tender advice to Alphonse and myself. They show a great want of experience of life, a way of looking at it athwart a somewhat narrow mysticism, which fitted but ill with the inexorable demands which in an early future it was about to make upon us, but they also revealed a soul of infinite kindness, steeped in idealism.'

It was at this school that Henri Daudet was stricken with brain-fever. His mother hurried to his side to find him dead, a pale face in a mass of black hair. The chapter in which Alphonse has described the arrival of the fatal news at the home in Lyons is certainly one of the best in 'Le Petit Chose.' '*Il est mort. Priez pour lui*,' was what poor afflicted Madame Daudet telegraphed. It was Alphonse who received this telegram. He relates that for some minutes he refrained from showing it to his father, who, however, at the sight of his son's face soon guessed the terrible truth. Relating this scene to the writer, Daudet said: 'My father rose

from the table, and cried : "He is dead! he is dead! he is dead!" His gesture, his intonation, had something of ancient tragedy about them, and impressed me profoundly.' And here another psychological phenomenon is to be put on record. Most boys lying awake on the night that followed the arrival of such a piece of news would have thought over all the periods of their lives which had been spent with this brother, and, remembering his kindnesses and their affection for him, would have sobbed and cried until sleep came, and with it oblivion. Alphonse Daudet, on the contrary, affectionate lad and excellent brother as he was, was preoccupied almost exclusively with the classic tragedy of the scene which had been enacted between him and his father on the receipt of the news. 'I remember that all that night I lay awake, trying to imitate my father's voice, to find the tragic ring of his voice, repeating "He is dead! he is dead! he is dead!" over and over again until I found it.' It is a sad thing that with actors and artists, as with men of letters, there is nothing in life that is not subjected by them to the vocation which absorbs them, and is in some sort the Doppelgaenger of their mental existence. They cannot feel as other men feel, for in all emotions they will strive to find the correlation of what they experience to its application to the art which they

profess. The cruel irony of this inevitable law is cleverly expounded by Emile Zola, in that passage in one of his novels in which he describes how a father, a painter, sitting down to weep over the cradle of his dead child, becomes gradually fascinated by the soft outlines and subdued tonality of the little corpse, sees a fine subject for a picture through his tears, and, dashing these aside, snatches up canvas, palette, and brush.

Alphonse avers, in describing the impression which this scene produced upon him, that, long ago as it happened, long ago as it is since his dear brother whom he loved so much died, even to-day when he receives a telegram he cannot open it without a thrill of terror. 'It seems to me that I am going to read that "he is dead," and that we "must pray for him."'

The few months which Alphonse spent in the Rue Castries were employed by him in working with that ardour which, when he elects to work, characterizes his efforts. It was clear to him, from the state of things at home, that he would not long be able to continue his studies at the school, and that at any moment he might be forced to earn his own living. So, putting aside *cænaculum* and excursions, the lad worked hard at his lessons, finishing his education side by side with his brother Ernest, who

devoted to his studies all the moments he could spare from his office. '"We jolly well sweated" in those days,' says Ernest, 'and derived such happiness from our voluntary labours, that, in spite of the sad *dénouement* of our stay in Lyons, this period seems less sad to us when we look back upon it athwart our souvenirs of the Rue de Castries.'

Alphonse says of himself that at that time he was a very pretentious youth, who, quite in earnest, considered himself a philosopher and a poet, and, for the rest, was not taller than a top-boot, without a single hair on his chin or lip. He does not say what others have said who saw him at this time, that he was a lad of most remarkable beauty, with a face and eyes which made women turn round in the streets after he had passed them by, and look after him in admiration.

If it be true that he was conceited about himself as a poet, there was every excuse for him. All the literary men with whom he was brought in contact in Lyons—Mayery, editor of the *Gazette de Lyon;* Paul Bertheret, who afterwards became secretary to the *Figaro* under Villemessant; Penin, the sculptor and artist, and many others whom the Daudets used to meet on the Place de Bellecour when the military band was playing—were loud in their praise of his talents, in their predictions of his future success.

Alphonse, as the author of a remarkable novel, 'Léo et Chrétienne Fleury,' was treated as a *confrère* by these men; his opinions on literature and art, the unvarying subjects of his conversation on the Square de Bellecour, were listened to with attention, and discussed with consideration. Ernest used to bring home to his parents glowing accounts of his brother's successes and the high opinion in which he was held in the literary world in Lyons. They began to look upon him and to treat him as a prodigy, full of brilliant promise, and was not all this more than enough to turn the head and develop the conceit of a lad of fifteen years of age?

'Our parents,' says Ernest, 'used to feel a temporary relief from their troubles when I repeated to them what our friends were saying of their youngest son.'

Alphonse left school in August of that year—1856—being at that time a little over sixteen years of age. His education was so far complete that he felt quite ready to enter the examination for the baccalaureate degree, which is the indispensable passport to all professions in France. Nobody who has not passed *son bachot*, as the French call it, can enter any of the higher schools, nor, indeed, is the man who missed his *bachot* considered to have completed his preliminary education. The examination,

though it embraces many more subjects, is not more difficult than are 'Responsions' at Oxford, and equally important is it as the *sine quâ non* of future progress. Unfortunately, the examination fees were comparatively high at that time, and Vincent Daudet's affairs were in such a bad state, and money was so scarce at home, that it was quite impossible for him to get together a sufficient sum for the purpose of enabling his son to take part in the examination and compete for the indispensable baccalaureate diploma. On the other hand, Alphonse was still much below the limit of age in which this examination had to be passed, and might accordingly wait till the next year, by which time it was possible, and, from a Micawber point of view, probable, that affairs at home would be better and the examination fees forthcoming. In the meanwhile it was necessary that some occupation should be found for Alphonse, and the proposal made by a relation of the family that he should enter the Lycée at Alais, as *maître d'études*, or usher, was considered by all concerned a good and timely suggestion. Vincent Daudet was assured that no objection would be made on the score of Alphonse's youth, and that a hearty welcome would be extended to Abbé Reynaud's great-nephew. This being so, the arrangement seemed an excellent one, for as *maître d'études* Alphonse would have

plenty of spare time—when the boys were in class—to continue his studies, and prepare himself still better for the examination next year, and, at the same time, would not only cost his parents nothing for his maintenance, but would even be able to put by a little out of his meagre salary towards the amount of his examination fees. On the other hand, the Daudets felt heavy at heart at the prospect of parting from their son, still a mere child, and frail and small. However warm the welcome might be at Alais College, the life of the *pion*, or usher, in a French public school was well known to be a hard one, difficult even for a vigorous young man, and not lightly to be faced by a sensitive child.

'Sixteen years old, with a tender soul and a delicate imagination, with all the weakness of his age, conspicuously unfitted to cope with material difficulties, affected with desperate shortsightedness, how would he be able to manage?' This was the question which kept putting itself to poor Ernest, who relates that the thought of separating from his brother rent his heart. 'He seemed to me so young, so unexperienced, so badly armed for the trials which he was about to face.'

As a matter of fact, no life is harder than that of a *maître d'études* in a French Lycée. The acceptance of such a post is, *ipso facto*, a proof of indigence,

and indigence is even a greater disgrace in the eyes of boys than it is with their elders in this generous society of ours. Again, the authority with which the *pion* is vested is of the weakest kind. His functions are not to teach the boys, but to superintend them. He accompanies them on their walks abroad, he presides over the preparation of their lessons, and he sleeps in their dormitory. The professors do not associate with him; he is a solitary, ill-dressed, underpaid individual, with duties varying between those of pupil-teacher and prison warder. The boys hate him because he is poor and humble, and because he constantly interferes with their liberties. They play tricks on him, and are as cruel as only children can be when they choose. They are encouraged in this by the knowledge of the fact that in a dispute between a pupil and a *maître d'études* the Lycée authorities will side rather with the former, as a source of revenue. On the other hand, the *pion* very naturally has a strong dislike for his troublesome charges, and exercises what authority he possesses in venting his not unnatural rancour. It is in his power to inflict impositions: he can deprive unruly pupils of their fortnightly *exeats*, and he can order them to remain indoors during playtime. He has, however, no power to inflict corporal punishment, under circumstances and in a *milieu* where

such punishment would appear not only absolutely justifiable, but urgently necessary. For of corporal punishment there is none at the present day in French public schools. Formerly the cane whistled as merrily and the birch swished as vigorously here as in most English schools, but such an abuse was made of both, that the system was abolished by Ministerial decree. The result is a bad one, and the undeniable superiority of the English schoolboy over his French contemporary may be largely attributed to the severer, more salutary discipline to which the former, under Biblical authority, is subjected. When one sees the French *lycéen* strutting about the streets of Paris, with his *képi* cocked on the side of his head, a cigar or cigarette between his lips, or observes him in his mooncalf glories in the vile beershops of the Latin Quarter, one cannot but regret that some sharper deterrent from precocious viciousness cannot legally be applied. One often finds one's self wondering what effect a course of sound canings would have on Gyp's 'p'tit Bob,' that truest type of the unchildlike elf which is produced by the present scholastic system in France. Any attempt, however, to reform this system in the direction of sharper discipline would raise a deafening outcry throughout the length and breadth of France. The French consider it a very brutal

thing for a master to strike a boy, no matter what the provocation may be. Indeed, so cherished are the little persons of the French public school boys by their doting parents, that in many homes in France the recent revival of athletic sports, of a kind, in the French Lycées is held in strong disapproval, expression for which is found in various newspapers. Physical exercise other than an occasional walk, or a game of marbles in the college playground, is so fatiguing as to be really dangerous to the health of the dear little fellows.

Alphonse Daudet, inexperienced as he was, was no doubt aware of what he might expect at Alais, but, in spite of previsions, which fell very far short of the reality, and the natural repugnance of a young man of great independence and some self-esteem for a post of certain humiliation, the proposal that he should enter Alais College as a *maître d'études* appeared to him a most acceptable one. Doubtless the affectionate lad was pleased to be able to alleviate the burdens of his family; his spirit of independence welcomed the prospect of earning his own livelihood, and no doubt he looked forward to the long hours of leisure, when, in a study all to himself, he would be able to give himself up entirely to literature. That as *maître d'études* he would be friendless and solitary pleased rather than frightened

him. He was at the age when one thinks one's self able to stand alone, and solitude, as has been recorded above, has always pleased him. This is a characteristic of most Southerners. Exuberant in society, it delights them at certain periods to isolate themselves, as though to gather fresh stores of vivacity. How often one sees in the South, on the benches under the canopy of vines in front of the house, or in the shaded silence of the olive-groves, men inert, immobile, expressionless, who, seen thus, would appear veritable village naturals; at other times active, loquacious, headstrong, but here reposing from past efforts, and recruiting fresh energies for the bouts to come! But the strongest inducement of all found by this imaginative child in the prospect held out to him was the novelty of the change, the possible adventures of the journey, the unknown that lay before him.

'From what I see,' he said to his father, after he had read the letter in which the principal of Alais College offered him a place as *maître d'études*, 'I have no time to lose.'

'You will have to start to-morrow,' said his father.

'All right,' said Alphonse Daudet, 'I will start to-morrow.'

On the morrow of this memorable day the whole

family accompanied him to the steamer by which he was to travel to Alais, by way of Valence and Nîmes. 'By a singular coincidence it was the very same steamer on which the family had travelled to Lyons several years before. All at once the bell rang; it was time to leave. Little What's-his-name, tearing himself from the embraces of his friends, bravely marched across the gangway. "Be steady!" cried his father. "Mind you don't get ill!" said his mother.' Ernest, relates Alphonse, wanted to speak, but was unable to because he was too much upset. 'Yes,' says Ernest, 'he was weeping, but his tears were no longer the morbid tears of his childhood; they were the fruitful tears of his precocious maturity, forced from his eyes by the cruel sorrow of this separation, the greatest sorrow which he had had to undergo in his lifetime.'

'Little What's-his-name,' says Alphonse, describing the scene, 'did not cry. As I have had the honour of telling you, he was a great philosopher, and really philosophers must not give way to sentiment. And yet God knows that he loved them, the dear ones whom he was leaving behind him in the fog. God knows that he would gladly have given for them every drop of his blood, every ounce of his flesh. But what could you expect? The joy of leaving Lyons, the motion of the steamer, the intoxication of

the journey, his pride in feeling himself a man, a free, grown-up man, travelling alone and earning his own living,—all this excited him, and prevented him from thinking, as he ought to have done, of the three persons whom he loved so well, who were sobbing there on the quays of the Rhone. Ah, those three were no philosophers! With anxious and loving eyes they followed the asthmatic progress of the steamer, and when the cloud of smoke above its funnel had dwindled down in their sight till it was no larger than a swallow on the horizon, they were still calling out, "Adieu! adieu!" and waving farewell. In the meanwhile, Mr. Philosopher was pacing the deck, with his hands in his pockets and his head facing the wind. He whistled, he spat, he stared at the ladies, he watched the sailors at work, he walked along with his chest out like a big man, and found himself charming.'

Alphonse adds that his vanity prompted him to tell a lie. He informed the ship's cook and two cabin boys that he held an important post in the Education Department, and was already earning a good income. 'These gentlemen complimented him on the circumstance. This made him feel very proud.' It has already been recorded in these pages that Alphonse Daudet admits the fascination exercised on him, in common with most Meridionals, by the

practice of untruthfulness. The Lie is, indeed, with most Southern Frenchmen, as it were, a figure of speech, so common and so general in its application as by that circumstance to be denuded of much of its reprehensibility. When all lie, the individual is not deceived to his prejudice more than he deceives others. In speaking with a Southern Frenchman, the latter will presume you are prepared for his habit of untruthfulness, will count on a similar habit in you. He will not expect you to believe his exaggerations and misrepresentations any more than you can expect him, with his way of thinking, to believe what you tell him. In relating matters of plainest truth, you will see in the eyes of your interlocutor an expression of disbelief, half amused, half contemptuous. Mention your income, the Gascon will immediately divide it by five and accept the dividend as its actual figure. Relate a fact which may be to your advantage or glorification, and he will assume that what really occurred was precisely the contrary. On the other hand, he will expect from you the same treatment of his statements, and adapt them in consequence. This characteristic detracts from the charm of conversation in the South of France, but it is a practice with which one soon becomes familiar, and, universal as it is, soon loses that repulsiveness of aspect with which in some other

countries it is endowed in the eyes of men. Emile Zola, moreover, speaks of the Lie as one of the needs of humanity, and will have it that the desire to be deceived is as human and natural as is the desire for food and drink. His latest novel, 'Lourdes,' is the exposition of the fact that the Lie is one of the inherent requirements of mankind.

On arriving at Nîmes, Alphonse first visited the principal of the local academy, by whose recommendation he was to enter Alais College, and the principal's exclamation on seeing him was, 'Good God, how small he is!' a remark which set Alphonse trembling with apprehension lest he might be found too little to fill the post. The principal, however, did not seem to think that his colleague of Alais would make any objection on this score, and wrote a letter of introduction and recommendation for Alphonse to present. He warned the lad that at his age and with his stature and appearance the work would be exceptionally hard, advised him to proceed to Alais without delay, and dismissed him with a friendly pat on the cheek. Alphonse rushed off at once in great delight to secure his place on the coach to Alais, a small town on the Gardon, about forty-five *kilomètres* to the north-east of Nîmes, the Alestum of the Romans, a stronghold of Huguenots in the sixteenth century, subdued by Louis XIII.,

who signed the Peace of Alais there, transformed into an episcopal See by Louis XIV., and fortified after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Having booked his seat for this destination, Alphonse had four hours to spare before the coach started. These he employed first of all in visiting their faithful servant Annette, who, after her return to Nîmes, had married, and was employed, with her husband, in keeping a restaurant; after lunching with them in princely style, he went off to look at his old home, the factory, where he had spent so many happy hours as a child.

'Do you want to know,' he writes, 'what it was that little What's-his-name wanted to see in the town before leaving? It was the factory, the factory which he loved so much, and which he had so mourned . . . the garden, the workshops, the tall plane-trees, all the friends of his childhood, all the joys of his early days. Ah! well. The heart of man has its weaknesses; it loves what it finds to love, even wood, even stones, even a factory. And, besides, it is a fact, recorded by history, that Robinson, grown old after his return to England, took ship again and crossed who knows how many thousand leagues of water to revisit his desert island. So it is not at all extraordinary that, in order to see his desert island, little What's-his-

name should take a few steps. Already the lofty plane-trees, whose crests peep over the house-tops, have recognised their old friend hastening towards them at full speed. . . . And he speeds and speeds; but on arriving at the factory he halts, stupefied.'

Like many others who after years have revisited the scenes of their childhood, he was to be disappointed. The factory no longer existed; it had been turned into a convent (still standing) by the Carmelite nuns. 'No windows were left, only dormers; a chapel stood in the place of the workshops. Above the door was a large cross in red sandstone, with a Latin inscription surrounding it. Oh, sad event, the factory is factory no longer; it is a Carmelite convent, where no man ever enters!'

And so Alphonse sorrowfully returns to the Alais coach with his back upon his childhood, now finally buried and effaced. From the experiences of a Micawber, he was about to pass to those of a Mr. Mell, to whom even a Steerforth, in the person of a loutish Cevenol lad, was not to be wanting. And be it noticed how much in the life of Alphonse Daudet resembles the career of David Copperfield. The coincidence of this similarity between the life of the young French lad and that of the imagined hero of an English novel is so strange that many superficial and malevolent critics have accused Daudet

of something akin to plagiarism in his novel 'Le Petit Chose,' which in its salient particulars is a true record of his own experiences. And àpropos of this criticism, this is what Alphonse Daudet, who feels strongly on the subject, has to say: 'An author who writes in accordance with his eyes and the dictates of his conscience can have no answer to make to such a criticism, unless it be that there be certain kinships of imagination for which no author is responsible, and that on the great day on which men and novelists were created, Nature, in an absent-minded mood, may easily have mixed up her moulds. I feel in my heart the love which Dickens felt for the poor and the disinherited, for troubled childhoods, and all the miseries of life in big cities. Like him, my first steps in life were heartrendingly unhappy; like him, I was forced to earn my bread before I was sixteen years of age, and in this I imagine lies our greatest resemblance.'

Daudet might have said 'our greatest and almost sole resemblance,' for the differences between these two popular novelists are well-marked. If Dickens created, or, rather, synthetized, a large number of types, whereas Daudet cannot claim a similar paternity, except in the cases of Delobelle, Numa Roumestan, and the immortal Tarascon, Daudet's absolute superiority as a stylist will always

be recognised by the readers of both. Dickens wrote hastily under the spur of the immediate necessities of weekly publication. Daudet, partly from superior artistic conscientiousness, and partly because at a very early period in his career he was rendered independent of his pen as a means of earning his daily bread, has always written slowly, laboriously, and with infinite pains. In the matter of humour, Dickens has a hearty contagious laugh, the laugh of the coffee-room, which sometimes descends to the guffaw of the pothouse; Daudet has the pale smile of irony, with cachinnation only in Tarascon. Both to some extent are sentimentalists, but whilst Dickens too often relies on easy effects, likely to please the Anglo-Saxon mind, the subtler Daudet has carefully avoided the same temptations. If Hortense in 'Numa Roumestan' dies of consumption, it is not an effect after the manner of little Nell and her dead canary bird, but was deliberately thought out, the criticisms likely to be provoked being duly weighed and accepted in advance. 'Why consumptive?' asks Daudet in reviewing his book in reference to Hortense le Guesnoy. 'Why this sentimental and romantic death, this so easy bait for the reader's sensibility? Well, because one is not master of one's work; because during the period of its gestation, when the

idea tempts and haunts, a thousand things dredged up and collected on the way in the haphazards of life mingle with it, like weeds in the meshes of a net. Whilst I was in labour with "Numa," I was sent to take the waters at Allevard, and there, in the inhaling-rooms, I saw young faces haggard, drawn, furrowed as with a knife; I heard poor toneless voices eaten away with disease, hoarse coughs followed by the same furtive motion of the glove or handkerchief hunting the red stain at the corner of the lips. Out of these pale, impersonal apparitions one formed itself in my book, as it were in spite of myself, with the melancholy train of the watering-place, its admirable pastoral setting, and all that remained there.'

In one respect, however, besides their fondness for the poor, and a preference for describing the lives of the disinherited of fortune, Dickens and Daudet resemble each other. Both are subjective, neither has much power of invention; both draw their characters from living models; and if Dickens vexed Leigh Hunt, Numa Baragnon was not quite pleased with Daudet. The latter has recognised this quality of his, and to some extent deplores it. 'I am a being altogether subjective,' he cries out in conversation with De Goncourt. 'I am permeated by actual things. . . . I can invent nothing. . . . I

have already used up the whole of my family. . . . I cannot return to the South.' He has drawn upon himself for many of his characters, to mention only Daniel Eysette, Numa Roumestan, Elysée Méraut. The Eysettes are his father, mother, and brother Ernest. Risler was a draughtsman in Vincent Daudet's factory, an Alsatian, and if Daudet changed his nationality in transplanting him into the novel to which he gives his name, it was in order 'not to mix up with my book sentimental patriotism, a catch for easily-earned applause,' the temptation to do which, under analogous circumstances, it is not certain that Dickens would have avoided.

The long drive from Nîmes to Alais seems to have left little impression on Alphonse Daudet's mind. No doubt that he was too impatient to reach his journey's end, too full of plans and hopes for the future, to be open to the impressions of the drive. The first thing that struck him on entering the town was the cold. The *tramontane* wind had been blowing all day, and Alais, as he has described it, is an ice-cellar when the *tramontane* is blowing, just as it is an oven when the sun shines. The next impression was the darkness. 'The streets were dark and deserted.' By a curious coincidence Daudet's description of his first impressions of Alais is identical with what Victor Hugo wrote of his cell in Mazas Gaol.

'On entering it, one is struck first by the cold and next by the dark.' Alais was to be a prison to Alphonse Daudet, and worse than a prison, a torture-room. 'It was on leaving the Lycée at Lyons,' he has said to the writer of this book, 'that I entered upon what was the worst year of my life. I was utterly unhappy. It was only during that horrible period that I ever thought of suicide. But I had not the courage to finish with existence. The misery which I afterwards suffered in Paris was nothing compared to what I endured during that year.'

On alighting from the coach Alphonse at once proceeded to the college, 'anxious to enter on his duties.' The college porter took him for a new boy, so young did he look. One is reminded of Latimer's unvarying attitude towards David Copperfield. The porter's wife and a man who was supping with them in the lodge compared him to certain of the pupils who were both older and taller than the new master. The principal, before whom Alphonse presently appeared, was still more discouraging.

'Why, he is a child,' he cried, springing from his seat as the new usher entered. 'Whatever am I to do with such a child?' Alphonse was too frightened to speak, and could only hold out the letter which the principal of the academy at Nîmes had given him. The head-master, a man with a small, pale,

wizened face, lighted by cold, colourless eyes, took it and read and re-read it. Finally, to the youth's great relief, he said that, thanks to the excellent recommendation given and the high respectability of the Daudet family, he consented to receive him, although his extreme youthfulness was a decided objection. This announcement was followed by a long lecture on the importance of the duties of a *maître d'études*. 'But,' says Alphonse, 'I no longer listened to him. For me the essential point was that I was not to be sent away—I was not to be sent away. I was wildly happy. I could have wished that the head-master had had a thousand hands, for me to kiss them all.'

Before retiring Alphonse was introduced to one of his colleagues, the second master, who handed him a little book on the Complete Duties of the Usher, divided into three parts, dealing with his relations to his superiors, his colleagues, and his pupils. He slept that night at an inn in the town; and when 'he found himself alone in that cold room, in front of that bed, in a strange and commonplace inn, far from all he loved, his heart overflowed, and this great philosopher cried like a child. Life frightened him now; he felt weak and helpless in face of it, and he cried, he cried.'

No doubt that Mr. Mell often cried too, although Dickens does not tell us so.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE EXPERIENCES OF A MR. MELL.

THERE is no more discouraging profession for a man in any degree ambitious than the profession of tuition. He finds himself assisting others to progress in life, whilst he himself stands still; preparing others to become persons of possible importance, and condemning himself to obscurity in a station of no account. It is, therefore, difficult to understand the enthusiasm with which young Alphonse Daudet entered upon his pedagogic career, all the more so that he was a keen and ardent youth, independent, undisciplined, adventurous, the very last person whom one would have thought willing to accept the monotonous drudgery of an usher's life. But it must be remembered that another of Alphonse Daudet's characteristics was that he was a most dutiful and affectionate son. He had seen the pitiful state of things at home; he had seen his mother's white hands soiled with household labour, and he was

determined to do what was in his power to lighten the burden of his parents. It is a fine trait of character. Many young men, even of lesser parts, would have had their heads turned by the praises which he had already won; and would it not have been a thousand times more agreeable to have remained on in Lyons, a budding poet and novelist, to be pointed out as such in the Place de Bellecour when the music was playing, and to listen while lolling in some Lyons café to the not wholly disinterested encomiums of Mayery, the editor? But Alphonse Daudet was a good son, and put his mother first, himself second. Describing the scene where, in the dismal room in the inn on his first night in Alais, he broke down, he adds: 'Suddenly, in the midst of his tears, the image of his people passed before his eyes; he saw the deserted house, the scattered family. There was no home left, no hearth remained; and then, forgetting his own distress to think only of their common misfortunes, he made a great and fine resolution, to reconstitute the home, and, unaided and alone, to reconstruct the dismantled hearth.'

On the following morning, having previously provided himself with a double eyeglass, which he thought would add to the dignity and diminish the youthfulness of his appearance, he proceeded to the

school, where he was formally introduced to his pupils by the head-master in a lengthy but dignified speech. To commence with, he was placed in charge of the youngest boys. Boys are admitted to the French *lycées* at the age of seven, but children of that age are not put to any serious tasks. They spend most of their time in playing in the courtyard at the games popular in French schools—marbles, tops, and touch-last—and until the age of nine, when their studies begin in earnest, they follow what may be compared to the Kindergarten system. It is part of the French educational scheme not to hurry boys on in early youth; and a child who at the age of seven or eight can already read and write is considered an exception. As a rule, boys enter school at the age of ten, but there seems to be no limit of age. Zola, for instance, did not enter the Lycée at Aix—his famous Plassans—until he was twelve years old. There is no preliminary examination, but every pupil must be furnished with what is called a *certificat d'études*, besides a certificate of good conduct. The oldest boy in the department placed under Alphonse Daudet's charge at Alais was only eleven years of age.

At first the usher was not unhappy. Naturally fond of children, he very soon made his charges fond of him. He had established his authority from

the very outset by a forced show of energy, swelling his voice and rapping vigorously on his desk as he invited his pupils to work. 'The little ones were not bad boys like the others. They never did me any harm, and I, for my part, loved them.' He never punished them. 'What good would it have been?' he asks. 'Does one punish little birds? When they twittered too loud, I had but to cry out "Silence!" and all my aviary was hushed, for at least five minutes.' Daudet's predecessor had boasted of the way in which he had maintained discipline amongst these children. Daudet found that the best way to maintain discipline was to endeavour always to be good and kind. When they had been very well behaved, to reward them he would tell them a story. No wonder they loved him. What little boys are there who are not delighted to listen to stories, especially in the monotony of the preparation-room; and a wonderful story-teller Alphonse Daudet must have been, even at that age, with his vivid imagination and a talent for improvisation, which has developed as he has grown older. Curiously enough, his stories were not stories of adventure, as one might have supposed from one's knowledge of his tastes and aspirations at the time, but tales after the manner of fables, tales about *cicades*, the 'Misfortunes of Master Jack Rabbit.' For then, as now,

La Fontaine was one of his favourite authors, and the tales told by the young usher to his eager pupils were but paraphrases of the master's fables interspersed with the narrator's own experiences. Unfortunately, the college authorities did not at all approve of any such innovations, and the fact that Daudet was more than once found amusing his charges, who should have been at work preparing their lessons, no doubt contributed to bring him into the disfavour in which he was afterwards held by his superiors. At the same time, this story-telling was good practice for the young author, exercising his imagination, strengthening his powers of improvisation, and forming in him a pleasant and easy style which, perfected with age, has made Daudet an incomparable story-teller, so that the reader of books finds himself, as it were, directly addressed, to the great enhancement of his interest and delight. But to this story-telling in the class-room the young author, for the time being, courageously and self-sacrificingly limited himself. In spite of his vocation for letters, in spite of the literary successes already obtained, and their encouragement to further efforts, he remembered the resolution he had taken on the first night of his stay in Alais, and, putting all his personal hopes and ambitions aside, cast his vanity behind him, and set hard to work to prepare

himself for success in the duller but more profitable career into which the necessities of his family had forced him. Not a moment of his leisure was wasted in amusement or employed in pleasant literary labour. Shut up in the little garret-room, which he shared with a fellow-usher, who spent all his spare time at one of the cafés in the town, he worked at Latin and Greek. 'He worked and worked unceasingly, cramming his head until it was like to burst.'

'Sometimes,' he relates, 'whilst in the midst of his monotonous task, a mysterious finger would rap at the door.

'"Who's there?"

'"'Tis I, the Muse, your old friend, the woman of the red copybook. Open quick."

'But he took good care not to open. Something very different from the Muse was in question.

'To the devil with the manuscript-book! What was of importance for the time being was to do a great number of Greek exercises, to pass the licentiate examination, to be nominated professor, and to reconstruct a fine brand-new hearth as quickly as possible. The thought that I was working for my family gave me great courage, and rendered my life more pleasant. My very room was beautified thereby. O garret, dear garret, what happy hours

have I passed within your walls! How well I worked there! How brave and good I felt myself!'

And certainly it was brave and good of Alphonse Daudet to work as he did and at what he did, even though, as he relates, he enjoyed his garret, a taste not uncommon amongst young literary workers forty years ago, though sadly out of fashion at the present time. Most youths, one fancies, enjoying the friendship and approbation of the editor of an important paper, would, if only for vanity's sake, have plied him with contributions. Moreover, in France, where letters have always been held in high esteem, to be a poet is a title to respect, and the temptation must often have been strong to Alphonse Daudet to prove his claim to this title in the eyes of his disdainful colleagues. Mayery would doubtless have printed anything that Daudet had cared to send him; and a copy or two of the *Gazette de Lyons*, containing his contribution, left, as it were by accident, on the table of the café which was frequented by the masters of the college, would no doubt have greatly increased the usher's importance. For, as he relates, 'the professors despised me, and looked down upon me from the eminence of their degrees.' His colleagues all had an aversion for him, especially as he never set foot in the café which they frequented.

One of the *pion's* duties in a French school is to accompany the boys on their walks, and a pitiable object he looks as he strides along with his rebellious and mocking charges. At Alais the boys used to go out every Thursday and Sunday afternoon, two by two, in three divisions. On reaching the Prairie, a large meadow at the foot of the mountains, the two other *maîtres d'études* would go off to the taverns with the elder boys, leaving the whole school in the youthful usher's charge. It was a Tantalus torture for a youth so fond of the country to be forced to devote his whole attention to a number of unruly boys. 'It would have been so pleasant to stretch one's self out on this green grass in the shade of the chestnut-trees, to intoxicate one's self with the scent of the wild thyme, and to listen to the song of the little spring. Instead of which, I had to keep constant watch, to shout, to punish. I was in charge of the whole school. It was terrible.' But what distressed him most (and this shows that the lad still possessed a proper vanity) was to have to march his draggling battalion through the streets of Alais when people were about. He felt the shame of his shabby clothes and the lowliness of his position. But his courage never failed him. He had an object in view—a pale mother to succour and to comfort—and nothing could turn him aside ; at least,

so he thought, and, doubtless, had he remained in the position which he first occupied at the college, that is to say, in charge of the youngest boys, until he had had time to prepare himself for his examinations, he would have realized what was then his ambition, and France might to-day have been richer by one more professor, and poorer—and the civilized world with her—by a master of prose and a novelist of genius. However, at the beginning of the second term of his stay at Alais he was promoted to the charge of the middle division, and it was the treatment which he received from these boys that, after much moral torture, finally forced him to abandon this career.

'And so it was,' he relates, 'that I took possession of the middle division. I found it composed of about fifty mischievous scamps, fat-cheeked mountaineers of from twelve to fourteen years of age, the sons of rich farmers, whose parents sent them to the college so as to make gentlemen of them at the rate of 150 francs per term. Coarse, insolent, proud, speaking amongst themselves a rough Cevenol patois, of which I did not understand a word, they were almost all ugly with the ugliness of moulting childhood,—their big hands red with chilblains, their voices like hoarse cockerels, their looks brutish, and over all the smell of the school.'

It is, by the way, only in 'Le Petit Chose' that Daudet, who is claimed as a disciple by the Naturalist School, ever speaks of the effects of smell. His colleague Zola was to make ample use of appeals to the nose in his descriptions. Daudet's finer, more artistic sense led him at an early date in his literary career to reject this aid to realism. If, as De Goncourt once said, Zola has the nose of a dog, with a special delight in sniffing out what is of evil odour, Daudet may be said to have discarded the use of his nose in his search after the truth of modern life. It is for his readers to decide whether he was well advised in so doing. Certain poets have admitted their indebtedness to this sense in the translation of their impressions. Others have had temperaments of an opposite nature in this respect; and if Baudelaire could ecstatically exclaim that his soul floated on perfumes, Wordsworth, it is a well-known fact, was entirely deprived of this sense, and one afternoon announced to Dorothy, not without joyous surprise, that it seemed to him that he had that day smelt the smell of primroses. It would be interesting to know what part the nose has played in the careers of the more eminent writers in the past, and all the more so because modern French literature abounds in appeals to a

sense which, according to the physiologists, is gradually dying out.

'They hated me from the very outset, without knowing me,' continues Alphonse Daudet, writing about his new pupils. Ernest explains that the prime reason of this hatred was that whilst they, the boys, were loutish, ill-bred peasants for the most part, the little usher was distinguished, elegant, proud, handsome like a demi-god, whose look flashed with intelligence, just as, under his shabby clothes, his every movement betrayed his native gentility. His delicacy clashed with their coarseness; their brutality mocked at his frailty.

'I was to them the enemy, the usher; and from the day on which I first took my seat at my desk in their midst there was war between us, war to the knife, unceasing, without truce or respite. Oh the cruel children! How they made me suffer! I should like to speak of it without bitterness, for all these sorrows are so long gone by. Well, I cannot do so; and, look you, as I write these lines I feel my hand trembling with fever and emotion. It seems to me that I am still in the midst of it all. They, I imagine, do not think of me. They have forgotten all about me and the fine double eye-glass which I bought, in order to give myself a graver aspect. My former pupils are men to-day,

sober, steady-going men. S—— must be a solicitor somewhere up in the Cevennes Mountains; V——, a clerk of the Court; L——, a chemist; and B—— a veterinary surgeon. They have positions in life, paunches, and all the rest. Sometimes, perhaps, when they meet at the club or on the square in front of the church, they remember the happy days they spent at school, and at such times, it may be, they come to speak of me.

'"I say, *greffier*, do you remember our little usher, with his long hair and his pasty face? What good jokes we had with him!"

''Tis true, gentlemen. You did have good jokes with him, and your former usher has not yet forgotten them. Oh, that unhappy usher! Did he not make you laugh? Did you not make him cry? Yes, cry. You made him cry, and that gave a particular savour to your jokes. How often at the close of a day of martyrdom the poor devil, crouching in his bed, clenched his teeth on his quilt so that you should not hear his sobs! It is so terrible to live in the midst of malevolence, to be always afraid, ever on the alert, angry, under arms at all times; it is so terrible to have always to punish—for one is often unjust in spite of one's self—so terrible to be always in doubt, to see traps on every side, to be unable to eat or sleep in peace, to be always saying to one's self,

even in moments of respite, "My God! my God! what are they going to do to me now?"'

He adds that were he to live a hundred years he would never be able to forget all he suffered. That was written when he was twenty-five years old, and to-day, nearly thirty years later, and close upon forty years since those days of suffering, his recollection is as keen as if these things had happened only yesterday. Speaking to the writer of his experiences at Alais, Alphonse Daudet used almost the identical language in which he described the same in the book written thirty years previously, and those who have conversed with Daudet know that he is never at fault for language to describe an experience. The sentence, 'Ah, the children were very cruel!' kept repeating itself, and a real look of pain came over his face. He must have suffered cruelly, deeply, bitterly. Yet—and this is another fine trait in his character—these early sufferings in no wise warped his character or embittered his temper. It is especially to be noticed that he has a great fondness for children, a fondness akin to that of Dickens, with whom here again he has, as a man, a point of resemblance. In this respect he compares favourably with Guy de Maupassant, his fellow in literature, whose peculiar insistence on the meanness, egotism, and cruelty of children is one of the bitterest com-

ponents of his unsweetened productions. And De Maupassant had never had to suffer from the treatment of children. For him they trailed no clouds of glory, only an evil mist; nor was it from any heaven that it came, but from the same foul swamp in which the protoplasm of selfish, cruel, cowardly, lustful man oozed itself into being. Daudet, on the other hand, is devoted to children. It is a pretty sight to see him with his little daughter Edmée, Edmond de Goncourt's godchild, the sweetest little girl, Parisienne to the tips of her dainty little boots. She is perhaps the only living being for whom, when in the throes of composition, Alphonse Daudet will lay aside his pen, and with it his preoccupation, so as to give himself up entirely to the little lady. He has always some present in his pocket for her, and—worldly as he is to some extent—is never happier than when able to relate to his guests some clever thing that Edmée said, some pretty thing that Edmée did. One wonders that he should have written so little about children from his point of view. The little Prince in 'Les Rois en Exil' is a mere sketch, and as to Sapho's love-child —whose vileness De Maupassant and Zola would so gleefully and redundantly have analysed, the former as intrinsic, the latter as the natural outcome of atavism—it is merely introduced to stimulate

Gaussin's jealousy, to render the final rupture more intelligible.

The boys took advantage of the usher's short-sightedness to play their cruel pranks. One day they placed an old trunk studded with nails on the staircase down which he was to come, and Alphonse Daudet fell over it and nearly killed himself. They used to arrange booby-traps on the door of his garret-room, to spoil his bed, and poison his food. Their persecution was unceasing. His authority was constantly set at nought, and the chapter entitled 'L'Affaire Boucoyran' in 'Le Petit Chose' is the description of a real occurrence. In fact, as in the story, the principal invariably sided with the boys, as sources of revenue, against the usher, and the injustice and humiliation of this proceeding added greatly to his sufferings.

It was only natural that under these circumstances the college should become so distasteful to him that after a time he sought change and relief in the café of the town, where, indeed, an even more pernicious society awaited him. It is indeed difficult to imagine inanity so complete as that which characterizes the habitual frequenters of a café in a small provincial town in France. There may be seen the effects of a prolonged starvation of the brain in their worst and most striking aspect. These loafers have apparently

no other objects in life than to make a maximum of canons on the soiled and sticky billiard-table; to colour their foul clay pipes; and to absorb as many glasses as possible of absinthe, vermouth, or beer. Of ambition there is no more than in a colony of limpets on a rock. When the conversation rises from the pettiest gossip to general ideas, the best talker is he who has most carefully read the Paris papers of the day before yesterday. A fatal *milieu* for a hungry-brained, inquisitive, knowledge-seeking youth. In this atmosphere of brutishness, with the despair of his miserable life at heart, Alphonse Daudet, but for the strength of his nature, might have sunk to the level of his companions, and not without excuse. Mental anæmia soon sets in from want of nutrition, and, as De Goncourt has remarked, even the strongest man soon becomes a 'stomach' in the French provinces. Daudet might have tried to console himself for his wretched life, and compensate himself for his unceasing humiliations by drinking, smoking, playing with the best of them. He had every temptation to create for himself a 'pothouse glory.' He was a clever speaker, and certainly the most cultivated of the frequenters of that particular establishment. There was solace to be found here for his wounded self-esteem. And how this self-esteem was wounded, not only by his

pupils and fellow-masters, but by all with whom he came in contact, is illustrated by the following anecdote, related by him to the writer :

'There was a child to whom I had been especially attentive, who had promised me that he would take me to his parents' house during the holidays. I was so pleased, and did so look forward to this treat. Well, on the day of the prizes, of which, thanks to my coaching, my young friend had received quite a number, he led me up to his parents, who were standing waiting for him by the side of a grand carriage. "Papa, mamma," he cried, "here is Monsieur Daudet, who has been so good to me, to whom I owe all these books." Well, papa and mamma, stout *bourgeois* people, in their Sunday clothes, simply turned their backs on me, and drove off with my young pupil without a single word. And I had so looked forward to a holiday in the country with the lad, whom I loved sincerely!'

How keenly the sensitive boy must have felt this humiliation and the many others of which this is but a single instance! Would there not have been every excuse for him if he had sought after compensation and redress in pothouse triumphs? But if, as Daudet himself has confessed, his wounded pride more than once prompted him to seek the end of his troubles in suicide, by the killing of his body,

he was not ready to destroy his mind. He passed unscathed through the fumes of the Alais café, just as he was afterwards to pass unscathed through a pestilent Bohemianism. And, moreover, at the moment when his life was becoming intolerable, his brother Ernest intervened and rescued him for better things.

After the departure of Alphonse from Lyons the affairs of the Daudet family had become more and more embarrassed, and so unceasingly did a catastrophe menace them, that the unhappy people found themselves almost wishing that it might occur, so as to know the worst. Ernest had determined, if the home in Lyons were broken up, to go to Paris and to try his fortune there in literary work. He somewhat naïvely remarks that his mother was not very hopeful about the ultimate success of such a scheme. She asked him what he expected to do in Paris, and said that it might be a good thing for him to go there if at least he had previously secured some fixed employment. His father said that he might do as he chose. Whilst Ernest was wondering how he could ever get together the money necessary for the journey to Paris, the catastrophe occurred which broke up the home and dispersed the members of the family. Since the Daudets had been living in the pleasant apartment in the Rue Castries they had

never once paid their rent, and as the fourth quarter-day approached, the landlord, who had acted with great forbearance because he sympathized with their misfortunes, told them that unless the money, or part of it, were at last forthcoming, he would be obliged to force them to quit. When this decision was communicated to the Daudets, Vincent was away, and a council of war was held by Ernest and his mother. They decided that it was hopeless to attempt to hold out any longer, and resolved to sell the furniture, pay their most urgent debts, and separate, Ernest to go to Paris, Madame Daudet and her daughter to return to Nîmes, where a home was offered them by one of her sisters. Only those who know how a French *bourgeoise* clings to her *ménage*, equalled only in this respect by the English workwoman's affection for what she calls her 'home,' can appreciate how greatly Madame Daudet must have suffered before coming to this decision. Thanks to the courtesy of their model landlord, she was allowed to preserve certain household objects to which she was particularly attached; the rest was sold by auction, and when all had been paid that had to be paid there remained enough to take Ernest Daudet to Paris with just fifty francs in his pocket. He spent the last week of his life in Lyons with a friend called Beurtheret, who shared his bed with

him, and gave him the excellent advice always to dress well in Paris. 'Make people envy you,' said Beurtheret; 'never, by any chance let them pity you.' Ernest was fortunately able to find a good tailor, who fitted him out fashionably on credit, and afterwards did the same for Alphonse, thanks to which circumstance the two young men were able to go out into Parisian society, and to form connections which apparently were of some advantage to them —at least, so Ernest thinks, and expresses a debt of gratitude to the confiding tailor. It was in certain drawing-rooms, he remarks, that Alphonse first made a reputation. Where Alphonse has written of the drawing-rooms which he used to frequent in the first years of his life in Paris, he has ridiculed them and the absurd pretensions of his hostesses of those days. Who has forgotten his sketch of 'Les Salons Ridicules,' published in 'Souvenirs d'un Homme de Lettres'?

'Oh, the number of comical drawing-rooms which I have seen! To what queer soirées did I take my first evening-coat, at a time when, still an innocent provincial, knowing life only through Balzac, I thought it my duty to go out into society. One must have dragged one's self about in the four quarters of Paris for two consecutive winters to know to what extremes the mania of giving recep-

tions in spite of everything can be carried. It is all rather vague in my memory, yet I remember the small apartment of a clerk, an outlandish drawing-room, where, to make room, the piano had to be placed in front of the kitchen door. The glasses of syrup were placed on the books of music, and when sentimental songs were being sung the servant-girl used to come and listen, resting her elbows on the piano. . . . And that other house, that fantastic fifth story, where the landing was used as a cloak-room, and the baluster for hat-pegs.' And, again, 'the house with a speciality for the relations of great men. One was told as a great secret, "We shall have Ambroise Thomas's brother this evening," or "a cousin of Gounod's," or "Gambetta's aunt." Never, indeed, Gounod or Gambetta themselves.' To judge from this extract it would seem that Alphonse Daudet does not consider himself very greatly indebted to his social connections for his subsequent very great success. Indeed, few of the men of letters in France who have distinguished themselves in this century may be said to be in any way indebted to society for their success. Balzac lived a hermit's life until long after his name was a household word in France; Gerard de Nerval lived no one knows how, no one knows where; Baudelaire hid himself from the world in a hotel-room in the

Rue d'Amsterdam; Leconte de Lisle in his study in the Luxembourg; De Maupassant took refuge from society on board his yacht; Jules Verne buried himself long ago in a suburb of Amiens; and it is only quite recently, when past fifty years of age, that Emile Zola has begun to come out of his cloistral retirement. George Ohnet and Jean Rameau are, perhaps, the only two men of letters of some repute who habitually figure in Parisian drawing-rooms, and always have done so; and of them it may be remarked that their claims to the title of men of letters are disputed by certain people. Balzac asserted that the law of art is constant labour, that Voltaire lived in his library just as Canova lived in his studio, and describes those who pass their lives 'in talking themselves, thus creating for themselves a kind of salon glory,' as semi-artists. Balzac's disciples seem to have taken this lesson to heart, and very few are the drawing-rooms in Paris which can boast the more notable of French *littérateurs* as amongst their past or present frequenters.

Ernest had such confidence in the power of fine clothes as a key to literary success in Paris that, as he tells us, he walked out in the city, on the morning of his arrival there, in evening clothes and a white tie. Such an accoutrement at that time of the day would not, of course, attract as much attention in

Paris as it would, for instance, in London, for in Paris the swallow-tail coat and the white cravat are often worn on official and ceremonious occasions even in the daytime. One of his first visits was to Claudius Hebrard, who was living in the Rue de Tournon, to whom he brought two letters of introduction from Lyons. Hebrard showed him round Paris, and, better still, allowed him the use of his rooms during a month's absence in Lyons, to which city he started on the day after Ernest Daudet's call. The second person on whom Ernest called was Armand Barthet, who authorized him to use his name whenever he wished a free pass to the Odeon Theatre, then, as now, the Parnassus of young men of letters. A third letter of introduction was to the Comte de Pontmartin, who really did trouble himself to be useful to his young protégé. He took him to the office of *Le Spectateur*, an Orleanist newspaper, which had been founded after the suppression of the *Assemblée Nationale*, and introduced him to Mallac, the editor, who, on Pontmartin's recommendation, then and there engaged Ernest Daudet on the editorial staff at a salary of £8 a month. 'Two hundred francs!' exclaims Ernest Daudet. 'That meant that my daily bread was assured, that I was certain of being able to assist my mother, that it would be possible for me to bring Alphonse up to Paris.'

On the return of Claudius Hebrard, after a month's absence in Lyons, Ernest was obliged to provide himself with other lodgings, and engaged a room in a hotel in the Rue Tournon, the Grand Hotel du Senat, a house which is standing to this day, and may be seen by those who are interested in Alphonse Daudet's career, and have read his description of it in 'Le Petit Chose.' It is on the right hand as one descends the Rue de Tournon from the Luxembourg Palace, nearly opposite the barracks, once the scene of Cartouche's most gallant exploit. At that time it was entirely inhabited by students. To-day it is frequented by grave senators and staid provincials. It is within a few doors of the Café Foyot, of recent dynamite notoriety. Ernest's room was a miserable garret on the fifth floor, which was let at the rate of twelve shillings a month. It was furnished with a small iron bedstead, a broken-down chest of drawers, which also served as washing-stand, a writing-table, two chairs, a cracked stone-ware stove, and a ragged piece of carpet laid on the red tiles of the floor. The one small window commanded a view of a chaos of chimney-pots, with the towers of the church of St. Sulpice in the background.

'When for the first time,' writes Ernest Daudet, 'on a gloomy October evening, I found myself alone in this poor abode, having left Claudius Hebrard's

comfortable apartment, the contrast was so cruel, and the feeling of my misery so profound, that my youth took fright, weakened by my isolation, by the tension of my mind, by an excess of work. My father without a position, my mother so far away, living in a house which was not her home, my brother in misery at his school—all these were painful visions which were brought before my eyes by the sinister aspect of these walls. I was terrified at the immensity of my task, at the weight of my responsibility, and I wept in silence. The impression was a passing one, and it was the remembrance of my brother, of the good companion whose talents I knew, in whom I trusted as in myself, that dissipated it.'

It is to Ernest's credit that as soon as he secured some sort of footing in Paris his first wish should have been to rescue his brother, whose wretched position was known to him from the many distressful letters which he received from Alais. The Latin Quarter is full of temptations to a young man. The Boulevard St. Michel and the Bal Bullier were within a minute's walk of the Grand Hotel du Senat, and on an income of two hundred francs a month a handsome young man could find some amusement. Most young men, and not the most selfish ones, would have considered it just enough for one. But

Ernest was a good brother, and decided that it was enough for two.

'One day, in answer to one of his letters, which was more heartrending than the others, I wrote to him, "Come!" And the wounded little bird took wing and flew for refuge to my side.'

It was under these circumstances that Alphonse Daudet left Alais to undertake the conquest of Paris.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### EARLY STRUGGLES IN PARIS.

The journey from Alais to Paris can nowadays be effected by the ordinary trains in a little under eighteen hours. In 1857 it took the third-class passenger the best part of two days and two nights. This terribly fatiguing journey was undertaken in October of that year by Alphonse Daudet, who set out on the conquest of Paris with two francs in his pocket over and above his third-class ticket, a few poems in manuscript in a battered old trunk, and in his mind a great determination to succeed. To the latter possession he added a vivid imagination, a thoroughly conscientious style, and a capacity for sustained effort. He was shabbily dressed, and wore a queer little felt hat perched on his long and fuzzy black hair. A double eyeglass focussed the fire of his eyes. He states that no matter how long he may live, he never will forget this first journey to Paris. One's memory is always keener for the

pains than for the pleasures which life brings with it. Certainly the journey was a very tedious one, and it was undertaken under conditions of the greatest discomfort. It was bitterly cold, and all the clothes that Daudet possessed were the light summer suit which he wore. Even to-day the third-class carriages on the French trains seem designed to afford the greatest inconvenience to travellers in the least possible space; it is difficult to imagine them as they were forty years ago. The young man had nothing to eat all the way, for he dared not part with any of his money—two francs. He was cramped up on his hard seat in a carriage in which drunken and howling sailors, fat peasants, fidgety old women, noisy children, and the like took their places in succession. He had no boots, for he had been unable to afford the purchase of a pair before leaving Alais, and travelled in goloshes, his only foot-wear. The compartment was pestiferous, 'with its smell of pipes, brandy, garlic sausages, and mouldy straw,' and this must have been a real suffering to a refined youth enamoured of the scent of wild thyme. But what he suffered from most was hunger, although no doubt a long course of meals at the Lycée, with its pulse-foods and *abondance*, had considerably weakened his digestion and impaired his appetite. To add to his sufferings, everybody

in the carriage had provisions in abundance. A large basket of assorted victuals stuck out beneath his seat and cramped his legs. 'The vicinity of this basket,' he says, 'rendered me very unhappy, especially on the second day.' The only refreshment of which he partook during all those hours was a pull of brandy from a flask which some sailors handed him in good fellowship. One of Zola's characters remarks, as others have also remarked, that many will offer drink, where none will offer food. 'The good fellows!' he exclaims in gratitude. 'How beautiful were their rough songs; how good was their rasping brandy for one who had eaten nothing for twice twenty-four hours. It saved me and revived me.' The cold was terrible. 'India-rubber goloshes are very good things, but to wear them in winter in a third-class carriage! My God, how cold I was! I could have cried. At night, when everybody was asleep, I used to take my feet in my hands and spend hours in trying to warm them.' In spite of all, he was happy, for at the end of his journey were Ernest and Paris. Ernest depicts his situation at the time in the following words: 'A child of seventeen years of age, delicate and unhappy, arriving in Paris empty in purse and stomach, curious, thirsting after the unknown, hungry for fresh sensations, full of presentiments of

the future, but rendered timid by the excess of his misery to the extent of doubting his own powers, of not daring to believe in his star, still too young, too poor in experience to appraise the value of the intellectual treasure which he bears within him.'

It was before daybreak on the morning of November 1, 1857, that Alphonse Daudet first set foot in Paris. He had no boots on his feet, and just two francs in his pocket. His brother Ernest was waiting for him with an unnecessary porter and a superfluous hand-cart. 'Our two spirits rushed together with all the force with which we embraced each other with our arms.' Unfortunately railway-stations are not organized for effusive demonstrations. It is difficult to say which of the two was the more delighted by this meeting. If Ernest's brotherly heart ached to see how shabby, how cold, how hungry-looking Alphonse was, it glowed with pride at his remarkable beauty. Theodore de Banville has left a portrait of him, as he was in his youth, in the *Camées parisiens:* 'A marvellously charming head, the skin of a warm and amber-coloured paleness, the eyebrows straight and silken; the eye, bright-burning and liquid, at once fiery and moist; lost in dreams, it sees nothing, but it is delicious to look upon; the voluptuous dreamy mouth, purple with blood, the soft and child-like

beard, the abundant dark hair, the small and delicate ear, combine in an *ensemble* which is proudly virile in spite of its feminine grace.'

The hair is gray now, though still abundant; the eyes, save in moments of excitement, as when a friend approaches, or a discussion grows warm, when the Third Republic is attacked, or music is being played, have lost much of their pristine fire; the warm amber of the complexion has faded, as amber fades when torn from the bosom of the refulgent sea; there is little purple left in his lips; pain has left its impress everywhere, like a fire it has scorched and seared and furrowed, and yet Alphonse Daudet's marvellous beauty remains. When one looks at him to-day, one is irresistibly reminded of certain lines in the 'Hyperion' of Keats:

> 'How beautiful, if sorrow had not made
> Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self.'

In following Alphonse Daudet's career it is useful for the purpose of forming an estimate of his character to bear in mind the exceptional and wonderful beauty which always has been his, for, being endowed with it, it is all the more to his praise that he ever held before him the high ideal which was his when, hungry and frozen, he first set foot in Paris—to do the best that in him lay in the

terrible career of letters. There was exhibited in this year (1894) in the Salon of the Champs-Elysées, in Paris, a picture by Rochegrosse which represented a knight in silver armour walking through a flowery meadow, steadily progressing towards some far-off bourne on which his gaze was fixed, while a throng of beautiful women, whose flower-crowned tresses were reflected in the silver sheen of his armour, surrounded him with alluring gestures and smiles full of promise, and strove, but strove in vain, to stay his step, to win a look from those steadfast eyes. Well, those who knew Alphonse Daudet, and what his career was, might have thought of him as they looked on this picture How many were the temptations, raised up around him by his great personal attraction, which sought to win his eyes away from the far-off bourne of the highest and best in art to which he was progressing, and only has not reached because to such an artist there is no finality. To the young man who, being poor, has any ambition of other than a sordid nature, great personal beauty can only be a curse. In the corrupt Paris on which Alphonse Daudet entered, and in which his early manhood was passed, it might have been for him doubly a curse. It was not so, and it is to his great honour that it was not so. The woman of the world must suffer to be

beautiful. The artist must suffer because he *is* beautiful, because his beauty will cause stumbling-blocks of every baleful kind to be strewn in the path along which he would proceed. One wants the companion story to Hans Andersen's 'Ugly Duckling.'

Paris exercises on the French provincial a fascination immeasurably superior to the attraction which other capital cities possess for the rural populations of the countries in which they are situated. The reason of this lies in the French character, in the French ignorance of geographical facts, in the diluted egotism so intrinsically French (unless, indeed, the Chinese may lay claim to it in a higher degree), which cannot be called patriotism—for that is a word of nobler significance—and can best be described by a term of their own coining, the word Chauvinism. In the Frenchman's eyes Paris is *the* city. Victor Hugo, the Chauvin of Chauvins, Taine's 'intoxicated National Guard,' would have it that Paris was the metropolis of the world and Europe its suburbs. In the Frenchman's eyes Paris is the city of cities, the Ville Lumière. London for him is a brick and plaster monster couchant in an unlifting fog; Berlin—well, Berlin; Vienna, the goal of Bonapartist military promenades; Brussels, a city of which the principal industry is the counterfeiting of French art and

letters, and Rome and Madrid, towns over the frontier and too remote for comprehension. Nine-tenths of living Frenchmen are firmly convinced that Paris is not only the richest city in the world, the most beautiful city in the world, but also the largest city in the world. On account of this national aberration it is always interesting to hear what are the first impressions of a French provincial of his metropolitan city. In the case of Alphonse Daudet, whose education and intelligence must to some little extent have modified the extravagant expectations of an ardent imagination, the account of his first impressions would be doubly interesting. Unfortunately, he is unable to remember them. 'I have often since tried,' he says, 'to remember the exact impression which Paris produced upon me that night, but things, like men, assume the first time that we see them a wholly peculiar physiognomy, which afterwards we fail to recognise. I have never been able to reconstruct Paris as it seemed to me on my first arrival. It appears to me like a city lost in the mist, passed through by me as a child, and never again seen. I remember a wooden bridge spanning a river which was all black; then a long deserted quay, and an immense garden skirting this quay.' Elsewhere he says: 'It was barely daybreak; we only met workmen with faces

livid with cold, or newspaper carriers occupied in pushing the morning papers, not unskilfully, under the doors of the houses. The gas-lamps were dying out; the streets, the Seine, the bridges, all appeared to me murky as seen through the morning mist. Such was my entry into Paris.'

Whilst Alphonse was gathering these impressions, the motherly Ernest, true to his rôle of Martha, was looking round for an eating-house where his starving brother might refresh himself. No such place was, however, to be found until the lads had reached the Rue Corneille, on the Place de l'Odéon, hard by the Rue de Tournon. A coffee-shop was open at the corner of this street, and it was here that Alphonse first partook of the hospitality of Paris. Three-halfpence worth of coffee, an omelette, and some fruit was the bill-of-fare of this humble repast. The bill-of-fare has its eloquence also, and a comparison between that of Alphonse Daudet's first meal in Paris and, say, one of such banquets as in these days Paris delights to set before him would be instructive. As a matter of fact, Daudet is indifferent to the pleasures of the table. His readers will have noticed that there is little 'eating' in his novels. Herein they again differ from Zola's books, which are replete with mastication. Zola is sincerely interested in food and the

partaking of food. 'My God!' says poor Gervaise, 'how good and how sad is it to eat when one is dying of starvation.' When he describes a dinner-table, he gives the bill-of-fare in detail with infinite gusto. In private life he is a *gourmet*. When he was a young man all that he could spare from his meagre earnings was spent in *primeurs*. To-day his table is royally served, and he has been heard to say that good eating is the one true, abiding pleasure of life. Balzac, on principle, fed himself for a long time on bread dipped in oil. His glorious disciple one day said to De Goncourt, who had asked him if he were a *gourmand*, 'Yes, I am. It is my only vice, and at home, when there is nothing nice for dinner, I am unhappy, utterly unhappy. There is nothing outside of that . . . nothing else exists for me.' De Goncourt, by the way, also confesses to an appreciation of gastronomical delights, but in his case it is due to the tradition of French gentlemen, who have held cooking as one of the fine arts. In his 'Mémoires,' describing a supper at which a fricassee of fowl with crayfish sauce and a salmi of woodcocks were served to him, he remarks: 'And as I relish these succulent things, with the respect due to art, I think what a nation we have been, what a paradise is France, and what savages our conquerors are.' As for Alphonse Daudet, he

never speaks, and rarely writes, about eating. Good plain food is served on his hospitable table. 'A man's nature improves when he has eaten,' he writes in one of the rare passages in which he treats of this subject.

After partaking of this frugal meal they passed, on their way to the Rue Tournon, by the Luxembourg garden. 'It was broad daylight at last. Paris was smiling on me with all her open shops; the very Odéon assumed an affable air to greet me, and the white marble queens in the Luxembourg garden, seen athwart the iron railings, in the midst of the leafless trees, seemed to me to nod their heads graciously, and to bid me welcome.'

Alphonse was delighted with the garret. It was then a matter of tradition that great writers should commence their career in a sixth-floor room. Balzac, who could have afforded a better lodging, purposely began his literary life in Paris in a miserable attic near the Place de la Bastille, which was so low that when he sat at his table his leonine crest appeared outside the sloping skylight window. The name of the hotel—Grand Hotel du Senat—tickled Alphonse Daudet's vanity. Here, indeed, was a fine-sounding address to give. And when he heard that just opposite was a house inhabited by the famous Ricord, physician to the Emperor, he felt that he was indeed and at last in metropolitan Paris.

His first weeks in Paris were lonely ones. He knew nobody but his brother, and was alone in the midst of a crowd. He was shortsighted, cowed, and timid. His brother had to leave him in the morning, staying away all day at his newspaper office. Alphonse, after fitful periods of work in his attic—for he was writing poetry at the time, and no regularity of labour is possible in the composition of poetry—used to creep out into the street, and make his way to the Odéon Theatre hard by. An arched gallery runs all round the basement of this theatre, and in this gallery are innumerable book-stalls. It was at that time in some sort the literary Rialto of the left bank of the Seine, and was frequented by writers, actors, artists, and lovers of books. In a walk round the theatre in this gallery one could acquaint one's self with the latest literary news, learn what new books had been, or were about to be, published, what new writers had sprung up in the night, the names of those to whom one night had brought the first beginnings of fame, and how, among accepted authors, some were holding their ground and others progressing onwards. This was forty years ago ; since then literary Paris has to a large extent deserted this quarter for the right bank of the river, and to-day few men of letters, with the exception of the eccentric *littérateurs* of the Latin Quarter, are

ever to be met with under the Odéon galleries. Leconte de Lisle, now dead, was at times to be seen there, hastily turning over the leaves of some recent book, nervously glancing round for fear of recognition. François Coppée is one of the few faithful, nodding, as he manfully strides along, to the stall-keepers, who step out of their little office sheds to salute the master, whose Roman-emperor mask they know well. Sometimes, too, after dusk, when the gallery lamps are lit, the Silenus head of Paul Verlaine, waiting for the absinthe hour to strike, may be descried in the penumbra.

In the year 1857, as has been said, it was otherwise, and young Daudet could see in the galleries of the Odéon most of the writers whom he burned to emulate. A figure which greatly struck him was that of Barbey d'Aurevilly, at that time contributing to *Le Pays*, and already recognised as a master both in fiction and in criticism. At that time he was forty-nine years old, and a mystery in his life added to the interest with which the young Southerner, romantic and adventure-loving, must have studied his strange appearance. For, twenty-seven years previously, Barbey d'Aurevilly had disappeared suddenly, and nothing more was seen or heard of him for twenty years, at the lapse of which period he returned to Paris. He always refused to tell where

or how he had spent these twenty years, and the strangest versions were afloat. Considered one of the leaders of the young school of literature, in 1857 his fame already rested on more masterpieces than one, 'La Vieille Maîtresse,' 'L'Amour Impossible,' 'L'Ensorcelée,' and others. The eccentricity of his costume was such as must have attracted Daudet's attention the very first time he saw him. He was draped in an immense cloak of black cloth, one flap of which, thrown back over his shoulder, revealed that it was lined with costly velvet. In those days the lining was black, in later years, when his head had grown white, it was crimson. At all times the materials of his clothes were of the richest qualities. He had studied Beau Brummel, and had written a book on dandyism and the dandy. He was a fervent Catholic, and a frequenter of churches. His books, written in a florid, sonorous style, not without grandeur, were defaced in places by deliberate bad taste, displayed, after the fashion of Baudelaire, to shock the *bourgeois*, and enjoyed no favour with them, though appreciated by the lettered few. D'Aurevilly lived and died a poor gentleman, magnificent abroad, miserable at home. A small room in a side-street in Montmartre was where, in 1889, this Beau Brummel of letters breathed his last. Paul Bourget closed his eyes. His conversation was brilliant but cynical, and

breathed disdain for all and everything outside the region of art. Alphonse Daudet came to know him, and their acquaintance developed affection and reciprocal admiration which lasted till the elder's death. Barbey d'Aurevilly used to dine at Daudet's house after Daudet's success had come, and De Goncourt describes such a dinner, one of the last to which D'Aurevilly came. He was dressed in white nankeen trousers, and a frock-coat with skirts like a petticoat. He ate little and drank copiously, and in the latter connection reminded his host of the time when, in the Latin Quarter, they used to sit together outside the cafés quaffing champagne, to the amazement of the passers-by. In the early period of their acquaintance Barbey d'Aurevilly seems to have influenced Alphonse Daudet in the matter of dress, and there was a time in Daudet's career when his amazing coats and waistcoats were the talk of the boulevard. Doubtless, like most men of artistic temperament, he felt that influence of dress which is expounded by Xavier le Maistre in his 'Voyage autour de ma Chambre.' Indeed, he has confessed it. He has related that his greatest joy as a child, when he got away from his home in Lyons to the club-room which he and his comrades had rented for their tippling and smoking bouts, was to put on a huge velvet Tam-o'-Shanter cap. 'With this cap

on his head, and an immense pipe between his teeth, he felt rising within him the pride of a grown-up man, an immeasurable feeling of pride.' The philosophy of dress underlies the narration in his charming sketch, 'Mon Premier Habit.' To-day few traces of this particularity remain. At home he sometimes wears a black velvet coat. For going out he prefers a soft felt hat, but where a high hat is necessary, he wears the flat-brimmed hat which is particularly affected by French men of letters who do not cut their hair. He is negligent rather than careful in his dress, in spite of Madame Daudet's motherly vigilance. And he likes his friends to come to his house in informal costumes, even when invited to dinner or to Madame Daudet's receptions. 'Venez en grand appetit et en petite tenue' ('Come with a full appetite but not in full dress') is the characteristic wording of an invitation to dinner which he recently addressed to the writer. The question of the influence of dress on men of letters and artists generally would form an interesting study. It is known how Wagner accoutred himself when at work, and the white monkish robe of Balzac is as famous as his slippers. Amongst contemporary French writers it is notorious that Jean Richepin and François Coppée find that they can write best when attired in flaming red. Leconte de Lisle used

to don a peculiar cap—a thinking-cap indeed! And other instances might be cited.

Another writer to whom Alphonse Daudet's attention was attracted in his early peregrinations round the Odéon Theatre was Jules Vallés. 'Bilious, sarcastic, eloquent, always dressed in the same ill-fitting frock-coat, he used to speak in a grating, metallic voice.' He had at that time just published a revolutionary novel called 'L'Argent,' a remarkable work for a man only just twenty-four years of age. Daudet relates that it was not until his first book had been published that he mustered up the courage to speak to Vallés. He does not tell us how Vallés received his advances. Ungraciously, no doubt, for even at that age Vallés was full of bitterness against life and humanity; and it was utterly impossible that any sympathy should arise between the bilious revolutionary on the one hand and the sanguine Royalist on the other. It is an excellent thing that circumstances willed it that Vallés should exercise no influence over Daudet. It could only have been an influence for evil. Let one imagine an Alphonse Daudet inoculated with the gall of a man who did not hesitate in his novel 'Vingtras' to pillory his own mother. And Vallés was a man who did not allow others to speak in conversation. De la Rochefoucauld's famous maxim, 'de la conver-

sation,' might have been written for Vallés. He was a monologist, and as such would be intolerable to Daudet, himself a brilliant talker. But his bitterness especially would render him antipathetic to the genial, warm-hearted Southerner, who, having gone through equal miseries, took pleasure in his better days in remembering them. Bitterness was the literary stock-in-trade of Vallés, and De Goncourt is quite right in saying of him that he used to nurse it, 'well aware that if it departed from him he would be as a tenor who had lost his voice.' He saw life through a glass stained with gall. Zola, the last person in the world to be charged with optimism, found his views on humanity nonsense and lies. Dining with Daudet one day, he kept repeating about Vallés, 'with comical anger': 'For me Vallés is nothing but a hempseed. No, indeed, nothing but a hempseed.'

Cressot, the author of 'Antonia,' to-day as forgotten as its author—a starving Gringoire, who lived nobody knew how; Cressot, the eccentric, the *débonnaire*, whom Daudet so often saw 'sidling along the walks, with his sad and suffering face and his long, starved body draped in a short cloak'; Jules de la Madelène, 'one of our best minor prose-poets, the too little known author of creations which excel by the truly antique beauty of lines, "Les Ames

en peine" and "Le Marquis de Saffras," a man of aristocratic manners, a fair head which reminded one of the Christ of Tintoret, with delicate and somewhat sickly features, and eyes full of sadness, mourning for the sun of Provence, his fatherland'—were others of those whom Alphonse Daudet used to meet, admire, and, it may be, envy in his lonely walks in the Odéon galleries.

These walks, desultory as they were, inspired and stimulated him. 'To meet famous men, to exchange a few words with them by hazard, what more is needed to inflame ambition? "I, too, will succeed," one says with confidence. With what enthusiasm I then used to run up my five flights of stairs, especially when I had been rich enough to buy a candle, which enabled me to work all night to elaborate by the light of its tiny flame verses, sketches of plays, treading on each other's heels on my sheets of white paper. Audacity lent me wings; I saw the future open wide before me; I forgot my indigence; I forgot my privations.'

One cannot help wondering where, if Daudet had been a provincial Englishman, he would have found such stimulus in London. Where could he have sought and found the inspiration of the sight of famous men? He might have wandered about outside certain literary clubs in Piccadilly or Pall Mall,

gazing wistfully up at the club windows, whilst in the Strand or Fleet Street he might have met more easily accessible journalists. But where the stimulus? One thinks of poor Chatterton's desultory wanderings about London, and that the galleries of an Odéon might have saved him. The parallel might be followed up. Both were poets, both came to their metropolitan cities at a similar age, both came penniless; and if Alphonse Daudet had a brother to go to, Chatterton had a cousin. And Daudet came to quaff champagne, to the amazement of the passers-by; and Chatterton—well, it is too notorious what he came to drink, and for what purpose. For if Paris is the mother, London is the stepmother of letters.

As in the case of most young men, the first literary endeavours of Alphonse Daudet were in the writing of poetry. The men of letters who have attained celebrity in France who have not commenced their careers as poets are few and exceptional. Even the bitter De Maupassant first stepped before the public with a volume of verses, and Zola's earliest efforts were in poetry. For in French opinion the poet is the chief in the hierarchy of letters, and it is for his place that all young men of letters first strive in France. Daudet had brought some completed poems with him in his scanty baggage; his activity during the first months of his

stay in Paris added to their number, and produced sufficient matter for a volume. In England a young writer would have obtained immediate publication for such verses, and remuneration withal, in the weekly journals and magazines. In France there was in Daudet's day, and is now, no such outlet. The French newspapers are conducted on even more commercial principles than the American press; and though the unknown poet is not, as in English-speaking countries, considered the fitting butt of ridicule, his productions, whatever their intrinsic value may be, are considered as of so little commercial value that no editor would risk the cost of composition in publishing them. And as with the editors, so with the publishers. Daudet had the exceptional good fortune to find a publisher who, attracted either by his personal appearance, or charmed by the ardour of his conversation, or, it may be, by some strange caprice, consented to print his poems at his own expense; and Daudet is, perhaps, the only living writer in France who had such good fortune. The invariable rule of Parisian publishers in dealing with unknown authors who have poems to publish is to demand, in advance, the cost of printing and publication. The estimate, although the cost of printing is higher in Paris than in London, is usually much less than would be asked under

similar circumstances by an English publisher. It varies from £20 to £30, according to the size of the volume. It never enters the heads of either publisher or author to make any allowance for advertising the book, because books as a general rule are not advertised in France, and books of poems never. Nor does the young French author enter upon such a transaction with any idea of gain of a pecuniary nature in his mind. He knows that by sending his volume to certain persons in Paris it will be read and judged on its merits by the public to which he wishes to appeal; of the other, the great, the shekel-bestowing public, he has no care nor thought. It is a visiting-card which he wishes to leave on his *confrères* and the *dilettanti*, and he knows that his card will reach both. And then in the world of letters an immense gulf separates the man who has published nothing from the man who has published a book, no matter what the book may be. To have published a book is in certain circles in Paris as much a distinction as the violet ribbon is to the outer world. It is a title to consideration, the handsel of possible fame, a first step on the ladder of the literary hierarchy. The French publishers are well aware of this, and for these advantages the beginner must be, and is, prepared to pay. Alphonse Daudet secured these advantages without the pay-

ment which it would have been impossible for him to make, and this was fortunate both for him and for France.

It was at the house of M. Eugéne Loudun, one of the librarians of the Arsenal Library, to whom Claudius Hébrard had introduced the two young Daudets, that, according to Ernest, Alphonse made the acquaintance of this publisher—Jules Tardieu—who, a poet himself, was willing to do what probably no other publisher living in Paris would have done—to publish at his own expense the first volume of poems of a young and unknown writer. Indeed, Alphonse, in his sketch entitled 'L'Arrivée,' has described his chase after a publisher and the constant disappointment which he experienced.

'In the meanwhile,' he writes, 'I had finished a little volume of poems, and went round calling on the publishers. I knocked at the doors of Michel Lévy, of Hachette. Where did I not go? I glided into all the large book-shops, vast as cathedrals, with my boots creaking terribly, and making a horrid noise in spite of the carpets. Bureaucratic clerks used to examine my appearance with cold and arrogant stares.

'"I should like to see Monsieur Lévy—about a manuscript."

'"Very well, sir. Will you give me your name?"

'And when I had given my name, the clerk, methodically, would put his mouth to one of the holes in the speaking-tube and his ear to the other.

'"Monsieur Lévy is out."

'Monsieur Lévy was always out, and so was Monsieur Hachette. Thanks to this insolent speaking-tube, nobody was ever at home.'

A publisher called Jacobet, who looked like Balzac without Balzac's forehead, in business at the famous Librairie Nouvelle on the Boulevard des Italiens, gave young Daudet some hopes. Unfortunately, Jacobet never kept the appointments at which the business was definitely to be settled.

'He was constantly making appointments with me for three o'clock in the afternoon at the Maison d'Or. "We will talk the matter over there together," he used to say, "and sign the contract on the corner of the table." What a humbug he was! Hardly did I know where to find the Maison d'Or. My brother alone used to console me a little when, with despair at heart, I returned home.'

Alphonse Daudet relates that he made the acquaintance of Jules Tardieu by chance one evening when he was lounging in the Rue de Tournon, where Tardieu had his offices and shop, and the publisher was taking the air on the threshold of his house. Imagination here has no doubt embellished

fact, and Ernest's version must rather be accepted. Of his publisher Daudet says that he was himself a man of letters, the author of certain works which had not been unsuccessful—'Mignon,' amongst others, and 'Pour une épingle,' 'compositions of a sentimental order, written in rose-coloured ink.' He does not say that this paragon of publishers came of a celebrated family of engravers, already known in the seventeenth century through Nicolas Henry Tardieu, the pupil of Audran, and author of 'Les Batailles d'Alexandre,' whose son Jacques Nicolas won notice for himself by his 'Misères de la Guerre,' and his nephew François by his 'Jugement de Paris,' after Rubens, and further distinguished by Tardieu de l'Estrapade and Alexander Tardieu, the engraver of the well-known portraits of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Marie Antoinette, and Napoleon.

Daudet's volume was entitled 'Les Amoureuses,' and was published in a white cover with red imprint. The book is not to be found to-day. Ernest says that it at once won for its author the esteem of the lettered and refined public. 'In one day he was classified amongst those beginners of whom one says, "He is somebody."' Edward Thierry, whose acquaintance the brothers had made in Loudun's drawing-room, reviewed the book most favourably in the *Moniteur Officiel*, a journal of great weight in

those days, when the truth was only supposed to emanate from official sources. It was probably here that the Duc de Morny first noticed the name of the young writer who was afterwards to become his protégé. Amongst other agreeable things which, in reviewing 'Les Amoureuses,' Edward Thierry said about Alphonse was the following: 'At his death Alfred de Musset left behind him two pens at the disposal of those who could pick them up and use them, the pen of prose and the pen of verse. Octave Feuillet inherited the former, Alphonse Daudet has just inherited the latter.' By a curious coincidence Octave Feuillet had just written his 'Roman d'un jeune homme pauvre,' and Daudet was just beginning to live his romance as a poor, a very poor, young man.

For he was miserably poor at the time. If the paternal Lyons tailor had fitted him out so that in respect of clothes he was presentable, he had no money for linen or boots. The want of proper foot-gear, which troubled him on his entry into Paris, was to harass him for a long time. 'I have spent days in bed,' he told the writer, 'because I had no boots to go out in. I have had boots which made a squashy sound each step that I took. But,' he added, 'what made me suffer most was that I had often to wear dirty linen because I could not pay my washer-

woman. Often I had to fail to keep appointments given me by the fair—I was a handsome lad, and women liked me—because I was too dirty and too shabby to go.'

Some part of the immediate success of 'Les Amoureuses' was no doubt due to the fact that previous to its publication the young author had made himself and his verses known in various drawing-rooms which Ernest had induced him to visit. 'Eugène Loudun's drawing-room opened the doors of others to us. At Madame Ancelot's, at Madame Mélanie Waldor's, at Madame Olympe Chodsko's, and in the drawing-room of Madame Perrière-Pitté, who was then rehearsing the part of fashionable protectress of letters, my brother used to recite his "Prunes," "Les Cerises," "Les Trois Jours de Vendange."'

The name of the last of these ladies is forgotten to-day, but both Madame Ancelot and Madame Chodsko are remembered in the world of literature. Madame Ancelot, *née* Chardon, was the wife of J. F. Ancelot, who at the age of twenty-five produced a tragedy called 'Louis IX.,' which met with great success, and won for its author a pension from Louis XVIII., and an appointment to the post of librarian at Meudon. In 1824 he produced 'Fiesque,' a play inspired by his study of Schiller. He lost his

place and his pension in 1830, and during the following ten years wrote for money rather than fame, producing a large number of comedies and vaudevilles, many of which were well received. He was elected to the French Academy in 1841, and died in 1854. Madame Ancelot was herself a writer of considerable talent, helping her husband, whom she had married in 1818, with his dramatic works. She wrote some successful comedies alone, notably 'Marie, ou Trois Epoques,' and 'Le Mariage raisonnable.' Her Complete Theatrical Works were published in 1848. At the time that young Daudet made her acquaintance she was writing novels, and had recently published 'Renée de Varville,' and 'La Nièce du Banquier.' She died in 1875, just when her former protégé was crossing the border-line which divides obscurity from fame. Madame Chodsko was the wife of James Chodsko, the well-known Polish historian and author of 'Tableau de la Pologne ancienne et moderne,' and of 'Tableau des revolutions de la Pologne'—the latter a conscientious picture of an immeasurable subject. He was appointed librarian, first at the Ministry of the Interior, and afterwards at the Sorbonne, and died in 1870.

In this society, says Ernest, his brother used to recite his verses, the prologues of comedies, 'gener-

ously emptying his jewel-case, unceasingly enriched with new treasures, in the presence of beautiful ladies, who went into ecstasies over his graceful bearing, his brilliant youth, his warm Southern voice, and his seductive beauty.'

A certain public was therefore assured for 'Les Amoureuses' even before it was published. One does not like to detract from the merit of Tardieu's altruism by supposing that he was aware of this fact when he entered into the agreement with Alphonse Daudet. It is fairer to presume that, like the beautiful ladies of whom Ernest writes, he too was won over by the graceful bearing, the brilliant youth, the warm Southern voice, and the seductive beauty of the young poet.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ALPHONSE DAUDET AS A POET.

In France the word 'poet' has a wider application than in England. It is a title of honour which is given not only to those who write verse, but to all those writers in whose works a certain artistic temperament, a certain conscientiousness of style, a certain love of the beautiful, and a certain striving after an ideal reveal themselves. In England it is applied to the writer of verse, and to the writer of verse alone. That is the definition which the English dictionaries give of this word. Is it unnecessary to add that, while a distinction in France, it is amongst the great English public an appellation which provokes smiles rather than respect?

It is in the sense of the definition of the word given in the English dictionaries that Alphonse Daudet is to be considered in this place. To judge of his title to the name of poet in the French sense of the word, his whole literary career may be studied.

His volume, 'Les Amoureuses,' now republished, with the addition of poems and sketches written up to the year 1861, by Charpentier, contains both lyrical poems, poetical sketches, and *fantaisies*. Of the lyrical poems perhaps the one best known is that entitled 'Les Prunes,' the tale, in verse, of how two cousins fell in love with each other in an orchard whilst picking plums. In subject it is familiar, domestic, and pretty, and in workmanship perfect. It is, however, at best a slight production, and the persistence with which it is recited in Parisian drawing-rooms, or at dessert at Parisian dining-tables, by precocious children, or white-frocked young ladies, as a variation from the 'Grève' of François Coppée, has evoked for it, even amongst Daudet's warmest admirers, a feeling akin to the one which is bred of too great familiarity.

A verse or two may be quoted as illustrating the commendable workmanship of the young poet :

'Si vous voulez savoir comment
Nous nous aimâmes pour des prunes,
Je vous le dirai doucement,
Si vous voulez savoir comment
L'amour vient toujours en dormant,
Chez les bruns comme chez les brunes ;
En quelques mots voici comment
Nous nous aimâmes pour des prunes.'

The poet goes on to relate that his uncle had a

large orchard, and that he himself had a cousin, and that one morning he was walking

'Dans le verger, avec Mariette,'

whom he describes in the following charming manner :

'Fraîche sous son petit bonnet,
Belle à ravir et point coquette,
Ma cousine se démenait,
Fraîche sous son petit bonnet.
Elle sautait, allait, venait
Comme un volant sur la raquette :
Fraîche sous son petit bonnet,
Belle à ravir et point coquette.'

Together they approach a plum-tree ; Mariette picks a plum, bites into it, and hands it to the poet.

'Ce fut tout, mais ce fut assez ;
Ce seul fruit disait bien des choses
(Si j'avais su ce que je sais ! . . .)
Ce fut tout, mais ce fut assez.
Je mordis, comme vous pensez,
Sur la trace des lèvres roses :
Ce fut tout, mais ce fut assez ;
Ce seul fruit disait bien des choses.'

This poem is simple and pretty, and, with the exception of the stop-gap sixth line of the first stanza, is of a very polished technique. It is a good specimen of the now tender, now ironical muse of Alphonse Daudet. The same may be

said about his poem 'Les Bottines,' written on a theme given by Goethe in his 'Wilhelm Meister':

'Moitié chevreau, moitié satin,
Quand elles courent par la chambre
Clic ! Clac !

Il faut voir de quel air mutin
Leur fine semelle se cambre,
Clic ! Clac !'

—a poem about a pair of dainty woman's boots, and all they suggest to the poet, and all the tender things of which they remind him. Of a higher order is the poem entitled 'La Vierge à la Crèche,' which depicts the Holy Mother bending over the cradle of the Child Jesus, who will not be lulled to sleep.

'Dans ses langes blancs, fraîchement cousus,
La Vierge berçait son Enfant-Jésus.
Lui, gazouillait comme un nid de mésanges.
Elle le berçait et chantait tout bas
Ce que nous chantons à nos petits anges. . . .
Mais l'Enfant-Jésus ne s'endormait pas.'

She tells Him many things to woo Him to sleep, but the Child will not be lulled, and

'. . . la Sainte Vierge est triste, bien triste,
De voir son Jésus qui ne s'endort pas.'

It is not until she weeps for very sadness that the Child falls asleep.

'Et Marie alors, le regard voilé,
Pencha sur son fils un front désolé :
"Vous ne dormez pas, votre mère pleure,
Votre mère pleure, ô mon bel ami . . ."
Des larmes coulaient de ses yeux ; sur l'heure,
Le Petit Jésus s'était endormi.'

It is evidence of a strong nature and elevated *morale*, that, in spite of tobacco and absinthe bouts in Lyons and the middle-class and inelegant debaucheries of Alais, the young poet should have found it in him to write a poem so tender, and yet so lofty, as this 'Virgin by the Cradle.' A love for children, and the recognition of what is beautiful in childhood, are not usually the preoccupation of ardent youths, and few, indeed, are the young poets who, forgetting for the while their lady-loves, have given expression to these sentiments. In Daudet's book, on the other hand, beside the poems already mentioned, are to be found amongst other verses relating to children, 'Aux Petits Enfants,' and 'Le Croup.' There is also an ode to a robin redbreast, and though love is the theme of several of the poems, there is only one set of verses to 'Célimène.' The young Southerner's ardent nature could not restrain itself in the sonnet's narrow room, and there is not a sonnet, that favourite form of expression amongst French poets, in 'Les Amoureuses.'

In 'L'Oiseau Bleu,' in which the poet speaks of a bird which lives in his heart—

'J'ai dans mon cœur un oiseau bleu,
Une charmante créature,
Si mignonne que sa ceinture
N'a pas l'épaisseur d'un cheveu'

—which lived upon his blood, a pastime and pleasure to him at first, and afterwards ate its way into his very soul—Alphonse Daudet shows that inclination for the fantastic, after the manner of Hoffmann, which later revealed itself in his stories, 'La Legende de l'Homme à la Cervelle d'Or' and 'La Pendule de Bougival,' an inclination to which some may regret that he did not more frequently yield.

On the other hand, nobody will regret that Alphonse Daudet did not more frequently yield to the inclination for pessimism which he manifests in the poem 'Le 1er Mai, 1857. Mort d'Alfred de Musset,' which begins :

'Nature de rêveur, tempérament d'artiste,
Il est presque toujours triste, horriblement triste,
Sans savoir ce qu'il veut, sans savoir ce qu'il a,
Il pleure ; pour un rien, pour ceci, pour cela.

Be it remarked, in this connection, that what the youth Alphonse Daudet wrote here about

De Musset, was to be in after years the very experience of Alphonse Daudet, the man. In his entry in his diary under date Sunday, April 2, De Goncourt writes: 'How quickly in this trade of ours as workers in creation is success paid for by physical uneasiness and derangement of the nerves. To-day I heard the happy Daudet cry out in tones of despair: "Oh, some of my afternoons are so sad, so sad! Look you, I could wish to be a woman, so as to be able to weep."' In this poem on Alfred de Musset he paints not unskilfully, though in language which might have been better chosen, a pessimistic picture of a poet's Weltschmerz:

'Jusqu'au jour où, sentant que son âme est atteinte,
Sentant son âme atteinte et son mal redoubler
Il soit las de souffler sur une flamme éteinte . . .
Et meure de dégoût, de tristesse . . . et d'absinthe!

This last line is what is least commendable in the volume.

'Les Amoureuses,' as it was originally published by Jules Tardieu, was a small book, the contents of which fill only eighty-one pages of the three hundred and fourteen that form the volume published by Charpentier in which they are reprinted. This volume is supplemented by a tale in verse, entitled 'La Double Conversion;' a dialogue in action called 'Les Aventures d'un Papillon et d'une Bête à Bon

Dieu,' also in verse; a fanciful dramatic sketch, 'Le Roman du Chaperon Rouge;' a mystery in two parts, 'Les Ames du Paradis;' a comedietta, 'L'Amour Trompette;' and a fable in dialogue, 'Les Rossignols du Cimetière,' the last four in prose. These various pieces were written and published in various periodicals between the date of the publication of 'Les Amoureuses' and the year 1861, and are now reprinted in Daudet's one volume of poems.

'La Double Conversion,' written in jingling and facile verse, is the story of how a young Catholic, André, loved a young Jewess, Sarah. The parents of the two young people would not hear of such an attachment. In the end André finds a solution:

'Oh, puisque l'amour est si grand,
Mignonne, qu'au fond de nos âmes
Il fait table rase en entrant,
Et qu'il y trône en conquérant
Sur des débris et sur des flammes;
Puisque nous voyons aujourd'hui
Que ni croyances ni systèmes
Rien ne peut tenir contre lui,
Puisque je t'aime et que tu m'aimes,
Adonc pourquoi nous obstiner?
Laissons faire l'amour, mignonne,
Et suivons l'élan qu'il nous donne.'

And so on. At the end he says:

'Viens-t'en nous aimer quelque part.'

'Yes,' she replies, and her answer re-establishes all the innocence of this child idyll.

'Oui, mais ne rentrons pas trop tard.'

'Les Aventures d'un Papillon et d'une Bête à Bon Dieu' are given *in extenso* in 'Le Petit Chose,' and were reprinted, in the same unfinished state, in this volume. This dialogue in verse, which is a fanciful and pretty conceit, inspired, it may be, by La Fontaine, shows how a rakish blue Butterfly seduces from his sober, steady ways a well-meaning and respectable Lady-bird, who is anxious to get home early, and in general displays all the *bourgeois* virtues. But the Butterfly takes him on his back, and flies away with him to the Lily of the Valley, where Master Lady-bird drinks so heavily of scented dew that on issuing forth it needs but little persuasion on the part of the Butterfly to induce him to visit the Rose. Here the Lady-bird becomes totally intoxicated, and the Butterfly has to take him home by force. Then the Butterfly sets out on his way home, feeling very sad, because the Lady-bird has told him how everybody hates him, and he cannot understand why this should be so, as he has never harmed anybody. On his way home he is waylaid. A Thistle stabs him, a Scorpion rips him with his claw, a Spider tears

away his blue satin mantle, and a Bat breaks his back with a blow of her wing. As he lies dying on the grass, the Nettles laugh with glee, and the Toads say: 'Serve him right!' And so on. This is symbolism as it was understood in France not so very long ago, and the fable is a true one, although no doubt in real life the Lady-bird would not, as in Daudet's poem, have come and wept over the Butterfly's lonely grave.

Of a symbolism of the same nature is 'Le Roman du Chaperon-Rouge,' which, by the way, was the first paper which Alphonse Daudet contributed to the *Figaro*. It was with this contribution, hurriedly and nervously thrown one evening into Villemessant's letter-box, that he commenced his brilliant collaboration on this journal—a collaboration which laid the foundation of his fame. Red Ridinghood in this fable in dialogue personifies the happy carelessness and unconcern of the artistic temperament. She woos the child from school, the man of letters from his work, two lovers from the perplexity of an attachment on which their parents frown, and having done these things goes off a-courting with a madman, the only man she can love. The child is beaten for playing truant, the man of letters has to pay for a day's idleness with a month's starvation, and the lovers have to atone for their dalliance by

undergoing their parents' anger. So they bitterly reproach Red Ridinghood, and though she calms their resentment with a charming apology for her pernicious doctrines, not one of them has anything to say when, the Wolf having devoured her, Polonius, who alone had resisted her blandishments, points out that such is the lot of the crazy and the improvident, of Red Ridinghood, and all her kind. One could wish to have seen Villemessant's face as he read this contribution in some worldly, sensual environment, as the fresh, strange fancy elbowed in amongst the thoughts which filled his head — thoughts of ambition, commercial speculations, schemes of enjoyment, hungry appetites. No doubt it was its very contrast with what was familiar to his bent of mind that won his approval for this first effort of a young and unknown writer. Red Ridinghood and all she personifies have ever preoccupied Alphonse Daudet's mind. Even to-day he would be glad to have the time, the leisure, the opportunity, to write 'The Last Red Ridinghood.' Who is the author who would not so be glad of time and leisure to write what he shall never write, because time is short, and opportunity never comes, and there is for all men a promised land where they shall never set their feet? Many are the books that Daudet longs to write, but never hopes

to write—a story of suffering, drawn from all the physical sufferings which in these last ten years he has endured; a story of Death lulling Pain to sleep in the innermost recesses of a tortured body, a theme which to some extent reminds one of a certain passage in Shelley; a story in which, in the form of conversations between two couples of different temperaments on a driving tour from Paris, he could formulate all the thoughts for which he has not yet found fitting application.

There is something of the youthful revolt of Schiller, as expressed through Franz Moor, though toned down by a keener artistic sense of values, in 'Les Ames du Paradis.' Daudet contents himself with concentrating his spirit of youthful revolt against what is established and accepted, in a dramatic attack against one tenet of the Roman Catholic creed. The purport of this 'mystery in two scenes,' and the style in which it is written, may be gathered from the last words:

'L'AMANT, *levant ses poings calcinés vers le ciel.*'

'En marche, soit! et puisqu'elle m'oublie, moi je me souviendrai. Oui, ce beau pain blanc de l'amour, qu'elle refuse, moi, je veux m'en nourrir éternellement. Gardez donc, votre bonheur, âmes infortunées, âmes du paradis. Il serait incomplet

pour moi, et je n'en voudrais jamais, au prix dont il se paye ; j'aime mieux mille fois cet enfer où l'amant se souvient, que votre paradis où la maîtresse oublie.'

'Les Rossignols du Cimetière' is another charming fable, a dialogue between the nightingales of a cemetery, who try to soften by their song the selfish, the ungrateful, the forgetful among those who visit the graves of the dead, and a nightingale of the woods, who has been drawing them away from the doleful garden ; the former prevail and win over the stranger to join them in their task.

It is impossible to compare the verse of Alphonse Daudet, or the prose pieces which, with ample justification, he has included in his volume of poems, with anything that had been published before, or has been published since. The work is entirely original, and the sense of this fact forces itself upon the reader even though here and there he may have fancied himself able to trace certain influences, to recognise certain resemblances. Unexpectedly the track deviates ; in the moment of recognition the fancied likeness fades away. The Muse is here a very will-o'-the-wisp, leading on, in fitful flight, from fancy to reality, from tenderness to raillery, now rising beyond the skies, now

pumping down into the street; a Muse who smiles when she weeps, who comforts where she chides, who is a philosopher here, and a next-door neighbour there, whose transformations, if sudden, are never *brusque;* a Muse too ethereal for classification.

It is easy to understand that these works should have attracted attention on their very appearance, so different were they from anything that France, at that time in her transition from romanticism to naturalism, had ever seen. It is not easy to understand that this attention was not more general, and that long years had still to elapse before the author of 'La Vierge à la Crèche,' of 'Les Ames du Paradis,' and of 'Les Rossignols du Cimetière' emerged from hungry obscurity to the banquets of fame. It is true that at that time the attention of men was elsewhere than in their studies. France was in full cry after the quarry, as was presently to be set forth by another hungry, yet observant, Southerner, at that time writing impossible verses in a garret in a dingy hotel in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. And when the appetites of the body are aroused, 'the other,' as Plato calls it, may go hang.

It may be of interest to read what certain prominent men have written about Alphonse Daudet as a poet.

'Above all things,' writes Emile Zola, 'Alphonse Daudet is a poet. His sensations are prolonged and vibrating; he beholds the crowds and the scenes through which he passes in the semi-hallucination of vivid imaginations. All things increase in size, take colour, animation, and intensity. . . . But there are at least two ways of being a poet — the rough and the tender. M. Alphonse Daudet is a tender poet. He was not born in rebellion, in bitterness, in the midst of the feverish protestations of revolutionary spirits. When he walks abroad, it is with the joy of finding the sky blue, women beautiful, and men good. He walks as a friend in the midst of human society. . . . M. Alphonse Daudet acts fairly towards Nature; he does not lie, he does not paint himself rose-coloured. He simply distils from Nature its elements of happiness. . . . He is a poet—a sentimental poet. . . . M. Alphonse Daudet began by writing verses. How many verses did he write? How many hundred still repose in his drawers—those happy verses written in youth, acid, like fruits which have ripened in a storm-swept orchard; those verses which one never publishes and constantly re-reads? I do not know, for poets have a great bashfulness about their first lispings. M. Alphonse Daudet contented himself with uniting

in a volume entitled "Les Amoureuses" a thousand or twelve hundred of his lines of poetry, and that is the whole of his poetic baggage. The volume is dated 1857—1861. Accordingly, the poems which it contains were written by the author between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. There is here but a handful of flowers plucked in early youth. But these flowers of childhood already possess a very fragrant smell, and even a dash of originality, wherein may be scented the emotional and mocking talent of the writer. One of these poems remains famous, "Les Prunes," a series of triolets, in which the poet relates his love for his cousin Mariette under a plum-tree. It was very popular, and is still recited in drawing-rooms as a classic. I may also name "Les Bottines," "Le Miserere de l'Amour," and an admirable *fantaisie* in dialogue—"Les Aventures d'un Papillon et d'une Bête à Bon Dieu." . . . Notwithstanding, it must be said that M. Alphonse Daudet's poems are but the waifs and strays of youth. They are but a beginning, nothing more.'

'It is well, I think,' writes Jules Lemaître in an essay on Alphonse Daudet, in which his bitterness is entirely laid aside, 'for one who wishes to see in truth and reality what is worth seeing, to begin by not scrutinizing it too closely, to be a poet, a

dreamer, no more, a being of delicate sensations, vibrating for mere trifles, looking for nothing more in things than such experiences, of pleasure or pain, as they may afford him, without any idea of reproducing them photographically. It is with some suspicion that I look upon such young men as one meets to-day, who, at an age when better men than they were naïvely singing of roses, dash off ultra-naturalist novels with descriptions of sinks or of dust-bins, and deliberately insist upon the uncleanliness of physical life. If they begin thus, where will they end? The least risk they run is that of always writing the same book over again, for their field of observation, if observation be at all requisite, is soon explored; the number of their effects is extremely limited, and nothing more resembles an *oaristys* seen from the point of view which they prefer than an *oaristys* seen from the same point of view. On the other hand, to have built up pretty fancies in the air in one's youth must lead one, when at last one turns to the study of the real world, to put aside, as unworthy of attention, what is commonplace and insignificant, to attach one's self to what is peculiar and unexpected in life, for if one studies life it is in the hope that it will furnish documents of greater interest than one's early imaginings.

'Little What's-his-name accordingly commences

with fancy and with dreams. . . . Arriving in Paris, delicate and pretty as a girl, timid, proud, impressionable, absent-minded, he continues to dream in a really shameless manner, writes verses about cherries, about women's boots, and about plums, sings of robin red-breast and the blue bird, sighs out the *Miserere* of love, and addresses to Clairette and to Célimène free stanzas which might be the work of a mincing Musset, in which irony, as is fitting, sheds a tiny tear. I know of no beginner's book which is so truly youthful as this little volume called "Les Amoureuses."'

Criticising the *fantaisie*, 'Les Ames du Paradis, mystère en deux tableaux,' Jules Lemaître writes: 'A woman has died, confessing herself to a priest and repudiating a criminal love. The lover has killed himself in despair. He is in hell, and his mistress is in paradise. Each year on Corpus Christi Day the roof of the Inferno gapes open and the damned see the procession of the chosen passing over their heads. But, as one of them explains, "We all have a friend, a relation, a brother, or a sister, or a mother, or a wife up there, and never have we been able to win one glance from these dear ones." The new-comer has no better fortune than the others. In vain does he supplicate and weep, in vain does he evoke the days gone by;

his mistress remembers nothing, does not recognise him; and it is so painful that St. Peter himself cannot help feeling touched. Here is a "mystery" in some degree redolent of heresy; for the Church teaches that not only shall the chosen forget the damned, but that the damned shall detest the chosen. But in this heterodox fancy, compromising as it is for St. Peter, there is an altogether delicious mixture of ingenuity, grace, and passion. Blending with the touching little drama are charming details of a paradise as imagined by a choir-boy—the little choir-boy of the St. Nizier Monastic School. "My eyes and my heart have also recognised her, this little cherub, clad in muslin, with the azure zone, waving in the air, with all the might of pink and plump little arms, a banner, spangled with flowers of gold, a banner as large as herself; 'tis my sister, my little sister Anna, whom I so mourned for."

'There is above all things in this truly human dream a deep tenderness, the gift of bringing little warm tears to the eyes, a precious gift which M. Alphonse Daudet will retain even when he shall dream no longer. And that is why I have somewhat tarried over this the young man's work. There is nothing better, after all, in order to depict the world as it is, than to have much imagination and sensibility. The spirit of our dear little

What's-his-name, whose childhood was not a happy one, who dreamed such pretty and such tender dreams, continues to float lightly over M. Alphonse Daudet's stories of real life, creeps in here and there, mixes emotion with the exactness of the pictures, and forces upon the observation so rare and so delicate a selection of details that, with no other artifice, it brings fancy welling up from reality itself.'

Here, then, are the appreciations of men so widely apart in every way of thinking as Jules Lemaître, the critical, the scholarly, and Zola, with his fixed idea, and both appreciations of Alphonse Daudet as a poet are favourable ones. (Be it remembered that throughout this chapter the word 'poet' is used in the signification given in the English dictionaries.) Both the criticisms quoted are from essays written many years ago, in days when Mallarmé was still silent, Moréas had not been heard of, and Verlaine was unknown. Since then French poetry has assumed a strange aspect. It has come from the fields and the glens, from hillside and brooks, from tender dreams of pretty and pleasant things, like Rossetti's 'Jenny,' and struts about the town a bedizened thing, with kohl-inflamed eyes and painted cheeks, hiding its wasted and anæmic form in flaring robes. It is more refined, its conversation is more

distinguished—indeed, so distinguished as to be often, if not invariably, incomprehensible; but it is not the fresh and buxom thing that it was. Beneath an intricate tissue of phrases, the poets of to-day in France—the exceptions may be counted—hide the vacuity of their minds, their total absence of ideas, the loss of all ideal, their want of courage, of virility, of humanity.

'Weil ein Vers dir gelingt in einer gebildeten Sprache
Die für dich dichtet und denkt, glaub'st du schon Dichter zu sein.'

One thinks of these lines of Schiller when one hears of the many who in France to-day lay claim to the title of poet. For French is a very cultivated language, and it is to this fact that most of those who to-day are known as poets in France owe this distinction. In no language can vacuity of mind be more effectually disguised. De la Rochefoucauld reads tame in an English translation, and the sparkle of most French wit dies out when decanted as completely as the sparkle in champagne left standing in a cup. In passing over in one's mind the thousands of lines of French poetry which have been written and printed in the last decade, how few are the lines which, technique aside, one is glad to remember as lines which under possible circumstances shall solace, or guide, or instruct!

To-day it is sound only that is aimed at in French poetry, which, no longer giving the lead to music, is content to follow as one of her train. There are Decadents, there are Symbolists, there are Romanists and Neo-Symbolists, but where amongst them is the man who tells something, imparts anything, points anywhere? And in lieu of fancy and charming illusion are given the skimmings of the lexicon and the rhyming dictionary. Poetry, which should be man's spiritual wife, has been degraded in France to a toy, a wanton, a mistress. She teaches nothing; in no wise does she comfort, or instruct, or elevate. She flaunts and grimaces and coquets, a spiced and yet insipid thing. From pointing upwards, or, if not upwards, away and beyond, she points nowhere. She is herself for herself, art for art, a silly self, and bad art at that.

And the amusing circumstance is that the poets of the present day, if asked as to the title of Daudet as a poet, will laugh and shrug their shoulders, and say that he is but a novelist. It is true that the world does not admit versatility. A man is classified as a poet, as a novelist, as a politician, or as a chimney-sweeper, and as a poet, a novelist, a politician, or a chimney-sweeper only—in spite of the fact that, in addition to his accomplishments in any one of these capacities, he may have other talents

as well, and have otherwise manifested them. Who, for instance, thinks of Shakespeare as an actor, of Shelley as a novelist, of Wordsworth as a prose-writer, of Burns as a ploughman, or of Swinburne as a swimmer? Yet they won a certain distinction in these various capacities. But the world, chary of discernment, gives a man a rank in one department only. So Alphonse Daudet is not considered a poet; 'Les Amoureuses' are left unread, and it is only by the frequent recitals of 'Les Prunes' that the world knows that the author of 'Sapho' has the workmanship of verse at his finger-ends and, outside the realm of reality, a charming fancy. It is all the more unjust because Daudet has in an extreme degree the sense of the picturesque in words, and in his writings will often choose an archaic form for the sake of the colour which it lends, the remembrances which it evokes, whilst explaining such use, and apologizing for such preference.

Of these poets of the present day, Symbolists, Decadents, *et hoc genus omne*, Ernest Renan, summing up their achievements and claims, said on one occasion: 'They are babes who suck their thumbs.' Leconte de Lisle was even more severe, and described them to Jules Huret, author of the 'Enquête sur l'Evolution littéraire,' as 'humbugs, these young people, every one of them.' Being

pressed to give a less general opinion, the author of 'Poèmes Barbares' remarked that his opinion about them was a very simple one: that not being able to understand a single word which they uttered, and being in total ignorance of what they meant to express, he had absolutely no opinion whatever about them. 'Yes,' he added, 'I do think of them that they are wasting their time, their youth, in writing what in a few years they will burn. It is really extraordinary, and, moreover, it is sad too. I see some of them here who talk very well, very clearly, like Frenchmen and like sensible people, and then, as soon as they set pen to paper, it is all over—farewell, a long farewell to French, to lucidity, to common-sense. Such aberration is simply phenomenal. And their language! Come, take a hat, and fill it at hazard with adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, nouns, and adjectives, draw the words out as they come and set them down on paper, and there you will have symbolism, decadentism, instrumentism, and all the balderdash which is derived therefrom. . . . They are the *amateurs de délire* of whom Baudelaire speaks.'

Zola speaks of 'the vague label *Symboliste*, which covers a few slop-shop verses.' 'To bring to its close,' he exclaims, 'this mighty century, to formulate the anguish of universal doubt, the per-

turbation of minds panting for the truth, here is the obscure twittering, here is the twopenny-worth of Christmas cracker poesies written by a few assiduous frequenters of pot-houses!'

It is by these *amateurs de délire*, by these 'producers of slop-shop verses,' and by those who out of ignorance or want of taste accept their pretensions, that Alphonse Daudet's claim to the title of poet is disputed. His work will be admitted, on the other hand, by all who understand poetry as the beautiful if simple expression of beautiful if simple ideas.

## CHAPTER X.

### IN THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND.

A GREAT step in the life of the provincial débutant in Paris is when he leaves his furnished room in a hotel, buys a few sticks of furniture, and, furnishing a home for himself, becomes a householder—a duly domiciled citizen of Paris with a *chez lui* of his own. This is the first step out of, and away from, Bohemia — the first step towards respectability, credit, and burgherdom. This step was taken by the Daudets during the winter which followed Alphonse's arrival in Paris. An upholsterer gave credit for what was strictly necessary, and the young men were, in consequence, able to move from their hotel, with furniture of their own, into the garret of a large house adjoining the church of Saint Germain des Prés. This house, which was situated at a distance of about five minutes' walk from Alphonse Daudet's present most comfortable apartment in the Rue de Bellechasse, has long

since been pulled down to make room for the new Boulevard St. Germain ; but Daudet never passes by the spot where it once stood without looking up in the air as though in search 'of the scene of so many follies, of so much misery, of such happy nights spent in work, of so many hours of gloomy and despairing solitude.' The window of their garret looked out on the clock-tower of the old church, parts of which date from the eleventh century. It was here that long ago the Parisians repulsed the Normans bent on conquest. Did the young Southerners, likewise bent on conquest, think of this, and resolve to have greater perseverance and better fortune, such as, indeed, was afterwards to be theirs? In the meanwhile the outlook was a dismal one. Certainly 'Les Amoureuses' had been a success, but no pecuniary benefit was to be expected from its publication, and the entire income of the two brothers was derived from Ernest's scanty earnings. On the other hand, as householders, though the house was but a garret, they were assured against such temporary homelessness as frequently befalls the needy lodger in Parisian hotels. On more than one occasion, during their stay at the hotel in the Rue de Tournon, rent being overdue, the landlord had refused to allow them to go upstairs to their room, and Alphonse Daudet

often speaks of a bitterly cold winter night, during which he walked about shivering and homeless, until at last he found refuge in the garret of a brother-author. He says that he will never forget how keenly he enjoyed the luxury of the warmth of that bed after the terrible cold of the streets.

But if assured of a shelter, they were not assured of their daily bread, in the most literal sense of the word, for in the meanwhile *Le Spectateur* had been suppressed by the police. The editor, Mallac, had written an article on the night of Orsini's attempt against the Emperor's life at the Opera, in which he had pointed out that it was only under despotic Governments that such outrages took place. The next morning, on arriving at the office, Ernest Daudet found that, by Imperial decree, the *Spectateur* had ceased to exist, just at a time when the editor had consented to receive occasional articles from Alphonse, and matters had, in consequence, begun to look more hopeful for the two brothers. Alphonse relates that his first article had already been written, accepted, and set up in type, and was to have appeared on the very day when the *Spectateur* was stopped. He adds that his despair was so great that he thought of suicide. Absolute starvation was staring the brothers in the face, when a place was found for Ernest on the staff of the *Union*, a

Legitimist paper, founded by the proprietors of the defunct *Spectateur*. Unfortunately, the editor could only give him a very small salary, less even than the forty shillings a week which he had been receiving, nor could any employment, even irregular, be found for his brother. It is difficult to understand how, during the period of Ernest's collaboration on the *Union*, which lasted some months, the two brothers can have managed to live. 'We existed,' says Alphonse Daudet, 'and that is all.' One cannot but admire the courage with which these two lads, in spite of all difficulties, remained true to their purpose — to follow literature as a career, and none other. Most people in their situation would have put away this ambition as not realizable; some would have compromised. The Daudets remained true to the motto of their Legitimist political creed, 'Fides, Spes,' kept faith in themselves and each other, and, while starving, hoped for better things in the future. Even the heroic Zola, starting in life with the same purpose and the same ambition, did not dare to trust himself to his pen from the very beginning. The idea of earning a living by other than literary work never once entered Alphonse Daudet's head, and had he ever had such a thought, it is certain that his courageous brother would have dissuaded him from

such a course. It is true that his timidity and his serious infirmity of short-sightedness would have disqualified him for most bread-winning occupations. No; he was a poet, and a poet he would be, and though De Banville had proclaimed that a poet's craft was the only craft in Paris which 'did not feed its man,' he preferred to starve as a poet rather than to thrive as anything else. He went further. He refused to employ his pen in the production of anything merely because it was marketable. He was as true to his conception, as conscientious in its execution, as indifferent to public taste and public demand when starving in his garret, as he is to-day in his luxurious study. 'This literary conscience, so strong, so severe towards itself,' writes Ernest Daudet about his brother, 'awoke within him simultaneously with his literary talent. It explains his process, the implacableness with which he constrains himself to perfect the expression of his thoughts, his hourly struggles with words, sifted, kneaded, moulded to the taste of his fancy. "It is style which perfumes a book," he wrote one day. And so it is that each one of his books represents an almost superhuman labour. Many are the pages, facile and harmonious, in which the sentences flow majestically, as a river rolling gold-spangled waters along, in which there remains not

ERNEST DAUDET.

*To face page* 212.

a trace of the effort which they cost, over which this admirably gifted artist, never satisfied with himself, has perspired, grown pale, and toiled in an effort so excessive that for days after he has remained broken with exhaustion. So none need wonder if in the end he has won glory and fortune. They represent a reward well earned by this great worker, who, at the outset of his career, had the courage to refuse all easy gains—the courage never to sacrifice to improvisation even when, as a young man, he was struggling with the material difficulties of existence, who at the age of forty can flatter himself that he has made of the cult of letters the highest aim and object of his life.'

It may be said of Daudet that, though by nature an improvisatore, thanks to his literary conscience he has never extemporized. During the three years which he spent in the Slough of Despond—that is to say, until the time when the Comte de Morny rescued him from literal starvation—his production of published work was limited to the prose sketches and fables in dialogue which now form a part of his volume of poems, and to a few tales, also republished. Under the direst stress of temptation his literary virtue remained intact.

It is certain that, to some extent, he owed this maintenance of his self-respect to the Lyons tailor.

Raggedness, even shabbiness, influences a young man far more than hunger. Would Chatterton have killed himself if he had been able to continue to 'fit himself fashionably'? for it was certainly no trouble about insufficient food that caused that tragedy in Brook Street, whatever M. de Vigny may have been pleased to write. Would a shabby Alphonse Daudet have resisted the temptation to earn money, not for his larder, but for his wardrobe? That at this time he was keenly sensitive in the matter of his personal appearance is proved by the fact that, as he told the writer, when his boots were unpresentable and his linen was impossible, he preferred to remain abed even when there was the strongest incentive to go abroad.

It was to the Lyons tailor also that he owed the possibility of figuring in certain drawing-rooms. For a young poet with dramatic ambitions it was a great thing to be invited, for instance, to the house of Augustine Brohan, of the Comédie Française, and it was at this soirée that Alphonse Daudet's first suit of evening clothes, as he relates in his 'Trente Ans de Paris,' received its baptism of fire. It appears that on that famous occasion the young poet was taken for a Wallachian prince, a supposition which, be it put upon record, greatly offended his dignity. It was, it should be men-

tioned, on the strength of the success of 'Les Amoureuses' that Alphonse Daudet had been invited to this famous house. Ernest had said, when the invitation came, that now his brother's fortune was made. Had not Musset written his comedy of 'Louison' in this house? Madame Augustine Brohan was reputed the wittiest woman in Paris; her salons were in consequence frequented by everybody who was somebody in the capital, and valuable acquaintances of every kind were to be made here by a young man of letters. Daudet's début was not a very successful one. The announcement of his name attracted no attention, and his shortsightedness made him feel and look awkward. He caused a catastrophe at the buffet, whither the pangs of hunger had drawn him, upsetting bottles and glasses. After this achievement he thought it best to make good his escape, and refusing the offer of Dr. Ricord, who still took him for a Prince of Wallachia, to drive him home in his brougham, because he had no overcoat, and was ashamed to be seen without one, he rushed off, to continue the night in peregrinations about Paris, as described in his sketch 'Mon Premier Habit.'

Of the other drawing-rooms which, thanks to the Lyons tailor, he was at this time able to frequent, Alphonse Daudet speaks not without raillery.

'What time lost!' he cries; 'what hours wasted over these venomous or foolish little nothings, in this atmosphere of little mouldy verses, of petty rancid calumnies, on these cardboard Parnassuses, where no spring flows, where no bird sings, where the poet's laurel has the colour of a head-clerk's green leather cushion! And to think that I also climbed these Parnassuses! A young man must see everything. The habit lasted as long as my first suit of evening clothes.'

Daudet is not, perhaps, quite right in thus underrating the society he frequented in the period referred to. His hostesses may have been *précieuses ridicules*, their guests people of little or no account, and their conversation as pretentious and as hollow as the drawing-rooms themselves; still, it certainly was an advantage to a young man, friendless and alone in Paris, to have some other place than the Latin Quarter cafés to frequent, other people than the Bohemians of Paris to talk with. He seems to forget this, and jests at his hostesses, though no doubt at the time he was not sorry to change his cold and gloomy garret for the warmth and light of their salons. Thus, he speaks of Madame Ancelot as a lady, all in white, 'who in 1858 still imagined herself to be the beautiful Madame Ancelot of the year 1823, when all Paris was applauding her clever

comedy called "Marie, ou les Trois Epoques," ' and in a somewhat fantastic vein depicts this interior where all and everything had grown old without knowing it. His descriptions of M. Patin, the Sorbonne professor, of Alfred de Vigny, of Viennet, amongst the habitués of Madame Ancelot's salon, given in the briefest words, are little gems of literary portraiture. 'At times,' he adds, 'the salon grew young again.' This was when young people came to it. Amongst these was Lachaud, the celebrated barrister, the son-in-law of Madame Ancelot, of whom this lady used to say : 'I am the happiest of women. I have a son-in-law about whom everybody speaks, and a daughter about whom everybody is silent.' Then there were the young poets, Octave Lacroix, Emmanuel des Essarts, Madame Anaïs Ségalas, and Jenny Sabatier, and the natural rivalry provoked in the poetical tourneys which used to take place at Madame Ancelot's receptions must certainly have benefited young Alphonse Daudet, even if he did not know it.

He speaks in the same tone of raillery about Madame Walder, who had been satirized by Alfred de Musset in verses 'which, for want of anything better, will transmit her name to posterity. . . . I remember her well, all in velvet, with black hair—the hair of a centenarian crow who stubbornly

refuses to grow gray—stretched out on her sofa, feeble and languishing, with the attitudes of a broken-hearted woman. But her eye used to glow and her tongue turn viperish as soon as *her* name was mentioned.' It appears that there was great enmity between Madame Walder and Madame Ancelot.

Of Madame Chodska he says that 'she must have been very handsome formerly, but was now a tall woman, straight and spare, with a commanding, almost disagreeable look. Murger, it was said, being very much impressed by her, had portrayed her in his "Madame Olympe." Murger, it may be remarked, at one time undertook a journey into *le grand monde*, and this was *le grand monde* which, artlessly, he had discovered.'

Yet he admits that he used to meet interesting people at Madame Chodska's house — Philarète Chasles, Pierre Veron, Philibert Audebrand, and a strange person called Philoxène Boyer, who, after spending his patrimony in living like De Rubempré for six months, devoted the rest of his existence to collecting materials for a unique book on Shakespeare, which was not destined to be written.

He is less severe in speaking of the receptions of M. Eugéne Loudun, at whose house he used to meet Amédée Pommier, 'a marvellous artist in

words and rhymes,' who at one time collaborated with the great Balzac himself, and Henri de Bornier, author of 'La Fille de Roland,' and afterwards of the French Academy, two notable men amongst 'the journeymen poets and Christian rhymesters who, after the champions of romanticism, had made their way into this eighth castle of the King of Bohemia.'

Unprofitable as this society may have been, it was certainly in every way preferable to the only other society at that time open to the young provincial poet, the Bohemia of Paris. By the fault of Henri Murger, this Bohemia was taking itself for serious, just as to-day, nearly fifty years after the publication of the 'Scènes de la Vie de Bohème,' it still continues to do. It is always regrettable when, by the curiosity or effort after originality of a man of talent, a class of society is brought, from the charitable obscurity in which it has wallowed unseen and unheeded, into the light of publicity and public attention. Thus to-day in France, in consequence of the writings of De Goncourt, Zola, and their hundred and one imitators both in prose and verse, the Lantiers, the Jupillons of the city, with all their womankind, have risen from the cesspool in which the contempt of all decent people had kept them out of sight, and now strut in the public

places, taking themselves and their infamy in earnest, believing themselves, because they have been told so by men of talent, to be factors in the picturesqueness of modern society, of sufficient importance to be studied—types, characters, having a definite part to play in life, and on this account having a *raison d'être*—all to the utter nausea of respectable men and women.

The foolish Bohemians of Paris were, accordingly, at the time of Alphonse Daudet's début in this city, taking themselves in earnest, and this erroneous sense of their importance must have increased their capacity for influencing those who came into contact with them. And among Bohemians would be included those semi-artists, as Balzac calls them, who pass their lives in talking about themselves, who may be distinguished at first sight by the eccentricity and, usually, by the uncleanliness of their appearance; who, never doing anything, are always, by their own statements, just about to produce some great work; whose instincts are as thievish, though not as courageously so, as are those of the nomads from whom they borrow their name, who find money for the pot-house, but never pay their creditors—a noisy, frowzy, unprofitable set of men. The type flourishes, if he can be said to *flourish*, to-day even as in 1848, when Murger discovered

that he was an interesting subject, and anyone wishing to convince himself how entirely Murger was mistaken, can study scores of Bohemians in any one of the cafés of Montmartre or of the Latin Quarter. The study is not a pleasant one, for the principal characteristics of these individuals are idleness, a vacuity akin to imbecility, a pronounced taste for disorderly living in all its phases, immense pretentiousness, and a confirmed habit of vituperating all those who, by hard work, or by talent, or by good fortune, have emerged from the obscurity to which they are themselves condemned by their incorrigible laziness. It is a study, moreover, which is not without danger to the student, for the contagion of loafing is great, and has communicated itself to many who at the outset had come to observe, as amused spectators, their rancours and futilities. In his novel 'Jack,' Alphonse Daudet has photographically depicted several of the characters whose acquaintance he made amongst the Bohemians of his day — D'Argenton, the poet against whom, although he never produced anything, publishers, editors, theatrical managers and the public were leagued; Moronval, the publicist, Labassindre, the musician, and Dr. Hirsch, the scientist, who also imagined themselves the victims of an immense cabal. Labassindres, Hirsches, and

D'Argentons may be met with by the score in any of the modern haunts of Parisian Bohemia. This class of human weed is perennial. Who, that has visited Montmartre or the Latin Quarter, has not met the musical composer who hums his compositions, but will never write them down; the scientist, who relies on eccentricity rather than on study and research; and the author, whose head is full of what Daudet calls the empty covers of books, which, incapable as he is of any sustained effort, will never be filled? Who also, that has lived in Paris, has not met the Des Roches of 'La Fin d'un Pître,' the writer of one only article, in which his entire energy had been exhausted?

The headquarters of these failures was at that time at the Brasserie des Martyrs, in the Rue des Martyrs, just behind the church of Notre Dame de Lorette. Daudet relates that he frequently used to visit this café, and as it is situated a good three-quarters of an hour's walk from what was his abode at the time, it is evident that Bohemia had exercised over him a decided fascination. One does not leave one's work and walk for three-quarters of an hour, especially with doubtful boots, unless the incentive is a strong one. The gatherings at this café were presided over by Murger in person, throned amongst the futilities to which he had given a name. He

was then in an acute mental decline, and though only thirty-six years old—he died three years later—both physically and mentally exhausted. With his bloodshot eyes and scanty beard, he should have served as a living, if moribund, example to the foolish young men around him. Francisque Sarcey, who met him at this time, is fond of pointing to him as a proof of how cruelly Bohemia acts towards her stepchildren.

Amongst the men whom Daudet met here were Pierre Dupont, also destined to die before his time, the author of famous rustic songs, 'Les Bœufs,' 'La Vigne,' 'Le Mois de Mai,' 'La Chanson des Foins,' and of a volume of Socialist poems, 'Le Chant des Ouvriers,' poems and songs, as Daudet says, 'all trembling with the fine dreams of '48, all echoing with the thousand voices of the Croix-Rousse looms, all perfumed with the thousand perfumes of the Lyonnese valleys ; Gustave Mathieu, whose fame has not survived, the author of the poems 'Les Bons Vins,' 'Le Coq Gaulois,' 'Les Hirondelles' ; Charles Monselet, a poet and prose-writer, who fought for the gastronomic tradition in France, and died, not many years ago, in great indigence ; Castagnary, who shook the dust of Bohemia off his feet before it was too late, and died six years ago, at the age of fifty-eight,

not without fortune and honours; Alfred Delvau, the story of whose sad life is one long sermon against Bohemianism; Malassis, a phœnix amongst publishers, publishing at his own charges the works of those who pleased him; and, greatest presence of all, Charles Baudelaire, who the previous year had published his 'Fleurs du Mal,' a volume of poems of which it may be said that never did any volume of poems produce a greater or more lasting effect. He was thirty-six years of age at the time, and was to die ten years later of a softened brain, another victim—and what a splendid one!—of the irregular life glorified by Murger, which exhibited itself in all its noise, spite, and emptiness in the Brasserie des Martyrs.

And be it noted that all these men whose names have been mentioned, each one of whom died long before his time, insane or indigent, were men of talent—in the case of Baudelaire, of genius. But what about the hundred or so of 'good fellows'—poets, painters, and playwrights—whom Daudet used to meet there? what about 'the thinkers,' of whom he writes: 'Those say nothing, nor do they write; they think. We admire them on trust; they are said to be as deep as wells, and the fact is that one is disposed to believe so, from seeing the number of glasses of beer which they swallow.'

To these gatherings the young poet of 'Les Amoureuses' came as a spectator, and as a spectator only. In spite of his youth and inexperience, he was keen-sighted enough to see the futility of this life, to foresee its dangers. The sight of such a master as Charles Baudelaire drinking gin or whisky in inordinate quantities may have interested him; it did not stimulate him to imitation. He merely looked round, and took mental notes to be used in the future, as in 'Jack.' And speaking of his brother's associations at this period, Ernest writes: 'Nobody has said, or will say, as well as he, how much impotence, jealousy, narrow-mindedness, unconscious perversity there was amongst these poor devils, defeated without a struggle by their laziness. As I have already said, it is simply marvellous that he should have lived with them without losing a tittle of his talent, or leaving behind him the flower of his youth, the freshness of his intelligence, the straightforwardness of his character. He shared their misery often, their disordered instincts never. He was always sufficiently master of himself to study the causes of their failure, and to defend himself against succumbing in the same way, visiting the lowest depths without ever leaving hold of the guiding-line which was to direct him back to the light.'

But curiously enough—for so the world will have

it, with its classifications—these excursions as a mere explorer into the kingdom of Bohemia have left, in the eyes of most, an ineffaceable stigma on Alphonse Daudet. The illusion is perhaps strengthened by the fact that he does not cut his hair, and avoids as far as possible the livery of the Philistine. 'The legend of my Bohemianism,' he told the writer, 'has clung to me all my life. Some people never would take me *au sérieux*. I remember once dining with the Duc Decazes, whom I was studying at the time for the purpose of one of my novels. I had written to tell him that I wanted to make use of his experiences, and he had asked me to dinner. Well, during the whole meal he related anecdotes of his career, and thinking that he had to deal with a Bohemian, he arranged his anecdotes in the way which, on this supposition, would interest me most. Thus, he always began each story with the words, "I was taking a *bock*." I suppose he thought that my idea of life was of beer-drinking in a café. At last I said, "Your Excellency seems to be very fond of beer," and afterwards added, "It is a drink that I have never been able to stomach." He seemed to understand what I meant, and changed his tone. But just as I was leaving him—it was at two o'clock in the morning, and the lackeys, I remember, were all exhausted and limp with fatigue—he said, "And

now let us go and lay traps for Bismarck." I went away thinking what an ass the man was to imagine that I should believe he was going to do anything but go upstairs to his wife; and he no doubt went upstairs to his wife thinking what an ass I must be to believe what he had said.'

So persistent, indeed, is this illusion, that not many months ago, when Alphonse Daudet was dining out, a *grande dame* begged him to tell her all about the fine times he must have at the Chat Noir, an establishment which, it is almost superfluous to state, he has never visited—a question as apposite as if some Park Lane hostess were to ask George Meredith what might be the latest joke at Romano's bar.

Alphonse Daudet never took train to Bohemia without a return-ticket in his pocket. Most of his time during this stormy period of his youth was spent at his writing-table in his garret. The success of 'Les Amoureuses' was there to encourage him. Had it not brought up his six flights of stairs, with an offer of collaboration, the famous Henri Monnier, creator of the immortal Joseph Prudhomme—a successful author, of sixty years of age, inviting an obscure lad of eighteen to work with him on terms of absolute equality—Thomas Gray knocking at Thomas Chatterton's door? He enjoyed the

pleasures provided for the students in the student quarter in which he lived, but, unlike many young men, did not give way to them. Bullier's saw him occasionally, not regularly. He ever kept the curb on an ardent youth, and, in spite of Marlowe-like instincts, rode clear of a Marlowe-like fall.

It would not be fair to say that in this he made a virtue of necessity, and that from a want of money a man must perforce incur Luther's reproach of folly. He liked 'Wein, Weib und Gesang' as well as most young men; but they were not his prime preoccupation, and his literary dignity forbade his indulging these tastes at the cost of his conscience as an artist. Nor, in order to earn money, would it have been necessary for him to force himself to take the jobs which, as is duly recorded in 'Jack,' were at that time offered him—the writing of scientific articles for an encyclopædia at the rate of half a centime the line, or a history of the Middle Ages at twenty shillings the volume. He might easily have earned a considerable income in journalism, but 'journalism was distasteful to him,' who cared to publish nothing which had not been polished, and polished, and polished again.

That at this period he firmly adhered to this line of conduct is all the more creditable that, not long after the two brothers had removed to the Rue

Bonaparte, Ernest Daudet was forced to leave Paris, to take over the editorship of a paper called *La France Centrale*. Alphonse Daudet was in consequence left to himself, friendless, alone, and with no other resources than the pen which he refused to hire out. When Ernest returned to Paris, his place on the staff of the *Union* had been taken, and the only employment which he could find was as secretary to an old gentleman who had served at the Court of Charles X., and was writing his memoirs. He is portrayed in 'Le Petit Chose.' Ernest's services in this capacity were remunerated with fifteen shillings a week. This income being totally inadequate to meet the needs of the two brothers, Ernest threw his Legitimism by the board, and offered his pen to the Empire. He was amiably received by Vicomte de la Guéronnière, at that time Director of the Press at the Ministry of the Interior, and by him appointed to the post of editor of a Government organ, *L'Echo de l'Ardèche*, at Privas. His acceptance of this post definitely separated him from his brother, and from that time forward Alphonse Daudet had to face the world and Paris alone—entirely alone.

In view of his complete victory in this battle, it may be well to sum up in a few words his character, position, and prospects at this time.

He was a young man in his twentieth year, of great personal beauty, but afflicted with extreme shortsightedness, awkward in consequence, and of a timidity beyond his natural bent, proud and passionate, yet of an affectionate and genial nature. He had inclinations towards disorderly living as a mental stimulus, but was restrained from dangerous excesses by a caution doubtless inherited from his prudent peasant ancestors, by an artistic repugnance for the vulgarity of debauch, and by a very ardent ambition, not entirely egotistical, inasmuch as it was his keen desire to be able to assist his mother in her present distress. He was painstakingly industrious, and recognised that it was only by constant labour and application that anything could be achieved in the career which he had elected to follow. He had suffered greatly, but had not been embittered thereby ; rather, his suffering had schooled him to face the difficulties which he expected.

In point of position he was penniless, living in a garret furnished on credit, dressed in clothes supplied on trust, dependent for his daily bread on his brother Ernest, and unable to look for assistance to any other living being. His father, shifting from one employment to another, could barely support himself; his mother and sister were at the charges of relations,

who made them feel their obligation. On the other hand, he had published a volume of poems, which had been received with a certain esteem, and he had the *entrée* to various drawing-rooms, where acquaintances of some value might be formed. His person appeared to inspire sympathy, and from his knowledge of this circumstance he was inspired with that self-confidence which in the battle of life is indispensable.

His prospects under these circumstances may be described as having been encouraging. There was evident appreciation amongst the public of his particular literary talents. He had never written anything for publication which had not been published, and afterwards praised; even the lost novel might be considered, from Mayery's appreciation of it, a successful attempt.

He had accordingly every incentive to continue, but in the meanwhile there was terrible hunger and terrible cold in the garret of the Rue Bonaparte.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ON HIS WAY REJOICING.

FORTUNATELY, during his short stay in Blois, Ernest Daudet had made the acquaintance of M. de Villemessant, editor and proprietor of the *Figaro*, and had spoken to him of his brother, so that De Villemessant was to some extent familiar with the name of Alphonse Daudet when the latter timidly slipped his first contribution—'Le Roman du Chaperon Rouge'—into the letter-box of the *Figaro*. The *Figaro* was at that time in the fifth year of its existence, having been founded by Villemessant on April 2, 1854. De Villemessant, the natural son of Augustine de Villemessant and Colonel Cartier, had begun in life as a dealer in ribbons at Blois, under the name of Cartier-Briard, Briard being the name of his wife. He was nineteen years old at the time, and at the age of twenty-four was adjudicated a bankrupt. He then came to Paris, and in 1840 founded a journal called *La Sylphide*, devoted to

fashions, fine arts, and belles-lettres. It failed in 1844. In this year, at the instance of the relations of his putative father, he was forced by a judgment of the courts to assume his mother's name. 'Yesterday I had no name,' he said when this judgment was pronounced, 'and to-day I have two. Such is life.' It was as De Villemessant that he then founded *L'Abonné*, a monthly publication, distributed gratuitously. Tiring of this, he next established a political paper, called *La Chronique de Paris*, which was suppressed by the police shortly after the *coup d'état*. In 1854 he revived the title of *Le Figaro* in connection with a new weekly journal, which from the very outset attracted the favourable attention of the public by its wit and cleverness. De Villemessant devoted himself body and soul to his new venture, and, thanks to his efforts, was able to assure its success. He soon felt warranted to issue the paper twice instead of once a week; but it was not till 1866 that the *Figaro* became a daily paper. He had many novel ideas for attracting subscribers. On one occasion he offered to present each quarterly or half-yearly subscriber with a box of six oranges, whilst yearly subscribers were entitled to a box of twelve. The offer was found amusing, and was talked about, which was what De Villemessant wanted. He was

the inventor of the new journalism, and the American journalists and their imitators in England have only borrowed his ideas and copied his processes. He created the *chronique*, or leading article on subjects other than political. It was in the *Figaro* that personal gossip, the appetite for which in the reading public goes on ever increasing, was first printed as news of possible interest; and it was in the *Figaro* that the *nouvelle à la main*, or witty anecdote, first found an abiding-place. De Villemessant attached great importance to the daily *nouvelle à la main*, and paid liberally for taking contributions of this nature. If a *nouvelle à la main* which had appeared in the *Figaro* was reproduced in other papers, a *douceur* was awarded to its author. He admired brevity, and impressed upon his contributors that an anecdote or paragraph of personal gossip, to be effective, should be as concisely written as possible. He used to say that a good story told in three lines was worth eighty francs, in ten lines half the money, and in twenty lines only two francs fifty. A man of little education, he was unable to write for his paper himself, but he had wonderful skill in guiding the pens of others. He maintained the severest discipline amongst the members of his staff. Rising early every morning, he used to read the day's copy of his paper from the first line to the last,

and mark such passages as he specially approved of or found reason to blame. The copy thus marked used to be pasted up in the general editorial room, and was always eagerly examined by the staff. So great was his influence over his subordinates, that even to-day, fifteen years after his death, the present editor of the *Figaro*, as he himself told the writer, does not send a copy of the paper to the press without wondering with some anxiety whether it would be approved of in all its details by De Villemessant. He used to say that a leading article should follow the order of a bill of fare. To begin with, there should be the *hors d'œuvre*, in the form of something light and piquant to stimulate the reader's appetite, next should come the soup and the *entrée* in the setting forth of the subject, then the *plat de résistance*, followed by a dessert of flourishes. He was of opinion that every man had talent and originality enough to write one interesting article, but he believed that there were only very few men who could maintain a level of excellence after their first or first few articles. He was pitiless towards those of his contributors whose work seemed to him to be falling off in quality, and inaugurated the heartless, though strictly commercial, system at present so greatly in favour with American editors, of constantly renewing his

staff, replacing by new and younger men the writers who had given their best. He one day astonished his staff, so Monselet relates, by bringing in a chimney-sweep whom he had met in the street, and bidding him seat himself at the editorial table and write an article on his craft and experiences. He pronounced the article when written excellent. His appreciation of journalistic work was entirely controlled by public taste ; and it was rather by reason of the fickleness of public taste than on account of hard-heartedness that he sacrificed old servants who had ceased to please. He used to lunch on the boulevard, and after lunch would engage his neighbours in conversation, bringing the subject to the day's *Figaro*, and soliciting opinions on its various features. Guided by what appeared to be the general opinion of his readers, he would dismiss or reward the members of his staff. He was not a hard-hearted man, although determined to allow no sentiment to stand in the way of his success, and many acts of kindness on his part have been recorded. Alphonse Daudet relates that on one occasion after the Commune he asked De Villemessant to give a place as porter in the *Figaro* office to a protégé of his, an ex-Communard. He was interested in this man, whom he afterwards depicted as Le Père Joyeuse in the 'Nabab,'

because, having recently lost his place, he was concealing the fact from his daughters, going out every morning as if to his employment, and in the evening, on his return home, inventing stories about what had happened during the day at the office. De Villemessant declined to give the ex-Communard the place which Daudet had solicited, because he said that to do so would be to give an arm to his numerous enemies, but very generously offered to make the man an allowance equivalent to what he had been earning in his former place, so that he might be able to continue his touching deception on his family. This allowance was continued three months, at the end of which time the man had found employment.

'The man and his work resembled each other,' writes Daudet, 'and never, it may be said, was human being more exactly fitted to his destiny. Of extraordinary activity, vivacious, busy, displacing an enormous quantity of air, sober withal, to a degree which used to be common, but would astonish people to-day; neither a drinker nor a smoker, fearing neither scandal, nor blows, nor adventures, but with few scruples at bottom, always ready to throw his preconceived opinions by the board, and never having had any very deep political faith, but pleased to display a platonic Legitimism and a respect for

traditions, because he thought them fashionable, Villemessant was just the captain needful to steer this hardy privateer, which during twenty years, under the King's flag strewn with *fleurs-de-lys*, sailed where its fancy guided it. He was tyrannical, capricious, but the interests of his paper were always at the bottom of his caprice and his tyranny. . . . "Is he good? Is he bad?" One is puzzled to answer; and Diderot would seem to have written his comedy with such a man in his mind. Good he is, certainly. Bad also, according to the day and the hour; and a painter might, without exaggerating a line or a tone, paint two portraits of him—one paternal, one cruel; one all in black, the other all rose-coloured—and there would be no resemblance between them, yet both would resemble the original.'

On the first occasion on which Alphonse Daudet saw De Villemessant, the latter showed himself in one of his cruel moods, and the young Southerner was present at the summary dismissal of Paul d'Ivoy, a leader-writer whose position on the paper seemed unassailable. Daudet had been watching d'Ivoy at work at the editorial table whilst waiting for the editor's arrival. 'He was writing, and as he wrote he smiled to himself with the smile of a man who is satisfied with himself; the sheets of paper kept

blackening under his pen. As for me, I watched M. d'Ivoy smiling as he wrote. I see it all distinctly, and I see my timid self, seated in a corner, pressing to my bosom my first article, paternally rolled and tied up. Villemessant had not yet returned. I had been told to wait, and I was waiting.' Suddenly the editor appeared. 'Are you pleased with what you have written?' he asked of the great leader-writer. 'Yes; I think it about hits the mark,' answered Paul d'Ivoy. 'So much the better,' said De Villemessant, 'as it is the last article you will write for me.' Daudet says that after this scene he wished himself a hundred feet beneath the earth. A shiver ran down his back. 'It is an impression from which I have never recovered. I have often seen Villemessant since, and he was always very amiable towards me, yet I never saw him without the shiver of disagreeable terror which Tom Thumb must have felt on seeing the ogre.'

Such was the man whose appreciation of Alphonse Daudet's talent laid the foundation of his great success. For though the *Figaro* was at that time only a weekly paper of recent foundation, to write for it was, as Ernest Daudet puts it, 'a consecration for a writer, a diploma of talent, the doors of the publishers opened wide.' And so it is to-day in Paris a great distinction, the blue-ribbon of

journalism, to contribute to the *Figaro*. A single successful article in this paper may make a man famous in twenty-four hours.

It may be said that it was with the publication of his first contribution to the *Figaro*, 'Le Roman du Chaperon Rouge,' that Alphonse Daudet was drawn from out the Slough of Despond and sent on his way rejoicing. Precarious as was the revenue to be looked for from work of this nature, there was at least the prospect of earning something, and till then he had been entirely dependent on his brother Ernest. Moreover, he had now a better tribune from which to address a wider public than Madame Chodska's salon or the study of Eugène Loudun.

He contributed to the *Figaro* for some years; and it was in the columns of this journal that first appeared the tales and sketches afterwards republished in the volumes variously entitled 'Lettres de mon Moulin,' 'Contes du Lundi,' 'Les Lettres à un Absent,' 'Robert Helmont,' and 'Femmes d'Artistes.'

It was no doubt entirely due to his conscientiousness, which never allowed him to send in any but his best work, and to the intense care with which it was always prepared, that Daudet was able to satisfy the terrible De Villemessant, and to remain in connection with the *Figaro* until, his talents as a

novelist and playwright having been acknowledged by the public, he was able to dispense with journalism as a source of revenue.

He often speaks of the joy with which on that Thursday morning he ran down his six flights of stairs and out into the street to the first newspaper kiosque where the *Figaro* was to be found, how he read and re-read the 'Roman du Chaperon Rouge' in print with a delight which far exceeded that which he felt in picking up, off the ledge of the *Figaro* cashier's desk, the remuneration of his work, the first money which he had ever earned with his pen.

His life from this period forth until when, in 1861, De Morny gave him a Government post, was one of suffering and humiliation, only relieved, now and then, by the satisfaction of seeing his work published in the most influential of the literary journals of Paris, and the satisfaction of knowing that, thanks to the remuneration for this work, bread, light, and shelter were assured to him for some weeks to come. When he could afford to treat himself—that is to say, on the days when he had received money from the *Figaro*—he used to go and dine at the *table d'hôte* at his old hotel, the Grand Hôtel du Senat, where a dinner was served at two francs a head, a miserable repast, no doubt, but sumptuous in con-

trast to what was his ordinary fare in his garret in the Rue Bonaparte. When his solitude weighed upon him, or when his natural propensity for playing truant drove him away from his work, he used to spend the evening at one of the cafés of the Latin Quarter. 'The cafés of the *quartier*,' he writes, 'were at that time not mere pot-houses where one smoked and drank. In the heart of a muzzled Paris, without public life or a public press, these gatherings of studious and generous young men, very schools of opposition, or, rather, of legal resistance, were the only places where free speaking could be heard. Each café had its special orator, and a table, which at certain times almost became a tribune, and each orator had, in the *quartier*, his admirers and his partisans.

'"At the Voltaire there's Larmina, who's a stunner. My word, what a stunner is Larmina!"

'"I don't say he isn't, but at the Café Procope there's Pesquidoux, who is better than he is."

'And off we used to go in bands, as on a pilgrimage, to the Café Voltaire to hear Larmina, and then to the Procope to listen to Pesquidoux, with the artless, ardent faith of the young men of twenty of that epoch.'

To-day the young man of twenty might beat the *quartier* from end to end without finding a single

gathering where his artless, ardent faith could hear anything beyond a jealous criticism of successful men, who do not frequent pot-houses, and the *chronique scandaleuse* of a society of lost women and men losing themselves. The Café Voltaire alone has remained a place of discussion, a place where obscure poets discuss their relative personal merits.

It was either at the *table d'hôte* of the Hôtel du Senat or in Madame Ancelot's drawing-room that Alphonse Daudet made the acquaintance of Gambetta. Gambetta was at that time living in the hotel in the Rue de Tournon, studying law and acting as secretary to Maître Lachaud, Madame Ancelot's son-in-law. Alphonse Daudet does not remember at which of these places it was that he first met the great orator. 'My memory,' he once said to the writer, 'betrays me in many respects; there are periods in my life which to-day are quite blank, so that I often compare my memory to a forest in which large patches, burned up by the sun, are quite dead.' Alphonse Daudet's detestation of politics and professional politicians has always been a trait of his character. 'Oh politics,' he exclaims in the epilogue to 'Robert Helmont,' 'I hate you! I hate you because you are coarse, unjust, noisy, and cackling; because you are the enemy of art, the enemy of work; because you

serve as a label to every folly, to every ambition, to every laziness. Blind and passionate, you separate good hearts which were made to be united; on the other hand, you unite beings altogether dissimilar. You are the great solvent of men's consciences, you accustom men to lying and to subterfuges, and, thanks to you, one sees honest men become the friends of rogues, provided they belong to the same party. But above all I hate you, O politics, because you have succeeded in destroying in our hearts the sentiment, the idea of patriotism!'

In spite of this feeling, which was as strong within him at the age of twenty as it is to-day at the age of fifty-four, when the only occasions on which the kindly Alphonse Daudet may be heard to speak with bitterness are when the conversation turns on the vagaries of the French Parliamentarians, he seems to have conceived a great admiration and some affection for Gambetta in his youth; he followed his career with considerable interest, and still speaks with great regret of his untimely end. It is true that Gambetta was a Meridional too, that the Meridionals are a clannish folk, and that Daudet, bent on conquest also, was interested to see with what arms his fellow-Southerner had entered the arena. Gambetta was only two years Daudet's senior, and if the younger man

abhorred politics, the elder, even at that time, took a sincere interest in art. 'Gambetta,' says Daudet, in an article written four years before the statesman's death, 'is one of the few political men who take an interest in Art, and suspect that Letters are not altogether without a place in the life of a people. . . . In the days of the Hôtel du Senat, the young barrister, who was my friend, used sometimes to miss a lecture in order to go and admire the masters in the picture-galleries.'

The difference in their circumstances prevented any close friendship, however. Gambetta, in receipt of an allowance of twelve pounds a month from his family, was one of the richest men in the *quartier* of his student days, and this sufficed to keep the proud, needy Alphonse Daudet aloof, except on rare occasions, as, for instance, when he used to go with his comrades to one of the gatherings he has described, to listen to Gambetta's vehement tirades against the Imperial Government, and to applaud his remarkable eloquence. What in later years especially endeared Gambetta to Daudet was the services which he rendered to the cause of the national defence during the war. 'I, a Parisian of the siege—I for my humble part recognised how admirable were the action of Gambetta in the provinces and that great defensive movement

which at first we had considered only a series of bragging *tarasconnades*.' For Daudet is a keen patriot, partly, no doubt, on account of the picturesqueness of the patriotic sentiment, which has always appealed to the artistic temperament, but chiefly because, having lived in the midst of the suffering and the humiliation inflicted upon his country by the invasion, he very naturally shares his countrymen's resentment.

It was Daudet who introduced Rochefort to Gambetta, at a *table d'hôte* dinner at the Hôtel du Senat. Rochefort was at that time in municipal employment, a clerk in the offices of the Paris Hôtel de Ville. He had written many poems which had not been appreciated by the publishers, and, disgusted by this failure, had turned his attention to journalism, in which his success has been so entirely unprecedented. When Daudet made his acquaintance he was contributing theatrical critiques to the *Charivari*, and there was nothing either in his manner, in his way of life, or in his literary style to portend his future career. The young men were drawn together by a sympathy of tastes and opinions, but were too dissimilar in character, except perhaps in respect of a fondness for raillery, to form any deep friendship. Daudet says that Rochefort had a way of laughing vertically, from

nose to chin, which would remind him of the Huguenot Provençal and predispose him against his new acquaintance. Still, the two have always preserved a feeling of mutual esteem. Rochefort always writes well of Daudet, especially when he can contrast him with Zola, whom he cordially detests, and Daudet always speaks well of Rochefort, 'thinks him a man of extraordinary lucidity of spirit,' and never misses one of his leading articles in the *Intransigeant*. He has described the first meeting of Rochefort and Gambetta at the dinner-table. 'Gambetta and Rochefort were, unfortunately, not made to understand each other, and, if I remember, they barely spoke together that evening. I see them, each at his end of the table, separated by the whole length of the cloth, such then as they were always to remain, the one, cautious and reserved, laughing dryly, and from nose to chin, chary of gestures; the other laughing from ear to ear, shouting, gesticulating, overflowing and evaporating like a vat of Cahors wine. And how many things, how many events, were foreshadowed by the distance which these two guests maintained between each other.'

That Alphonse Daudet, so shortly after his arrival in Paris, and in spite of the circumstances in which he was placed, should have made two

friends so entirely different in character and aims as Rochefort and Gambetta, shows that already at that time he exercised over all who approached him that charm which made Jules Lemaître write of him in his study of contemporary *littérateurs*: 'He draws all hearts after him.' It may also be noticed, as proving his firmness of purpose already at that age, that though naturally timid, and a younger man than either of the two, he was influenced neither by Gambetta nor by Rochefort, much as the example of both one and the other must have tempted him to seek greater prosperity in a less arduous career.

Amongst other friends whom he won for himself during these early days in Paris may be mentioned the names of Therion, blended in a composite photograph with Daudet himself as the Elysée Méraut of 'Les Rois en Exil,' Castagnary, author of 'La Philosophie du Salon de 1857,' art critic and Government official, to whom allusion has already been made, Emmanuel des Essarts, Bataille, Jean Du Boys, Amédée Rolland, Pierre Véron, most inexhaustible of *chroniqueurs*, and Louis Bouilhet. The last-named, with whom as a poet Alphonse Daudet was naturally most in sympathy, was at that time a man of thirty-seven, and had just published his volume of poems, 'Festons et

Astragales,' which includes a remarkable Roman tale in verse, entitled 'Mélaenis,' the original publication of which, in 1851, in the *Revue de Paris*, had first attracted public attention to his name. Two plays from his pen, after the fashion of the romanticists, had already been performed with some success—'Madame de Montarcy,' a drama in verse, at the Odéon in 1856, and in 1858, on the same stage, 'Hélène Peyron,' also in verse. He died in 1869 at the age of forty-seven, and in this connection it may be noticed that most of the men of the generation which was in full literary or artistic activity at the time when Daudet began his career in Paris came to unfortunate, or at least untimely, ends. Was the cause of this the high pressure of life under the Empire, or the body-and-soul-devouring Bohemianism glorified by Murger?

With reference to the Du Boys and the Bataille mentioned above as amongst his first friends in Paris, Daudet relates an anecdote which might have served him for a fantastic story after the fashion of his 'Homme au Cerveau d'Or,' and other tales written in a Hoffmann vein. Whilst on the visit to Munich which he has described in 'L'Empereur Aveugle,' he purchased three Tyrolean hats of green cloth as presents for Du Boys, Bataille,

and Gill, the famous caricaturist, and, on his return to Paris, gave them to his three friends. The wearers of the three green hats all died insane, and it was whilst wearing these hats that both Du Boys and Bataille first manifested a tendency to madness. In the case of Bataille this took place one day when he was out walking with Daudet, when he told him that his father was a drunkard, who drowned himself in a cesspool, and begged Daudet to prevent him from drinking, for he felt that he would end badly. Du Boys, usually a most placid man, one day startled Madame Daudet with an outburst of most violent language. He was wearing his green hat at the time. Would not 'The Story of the Three Green Hats,' treated by Daudet, make an admirable *conte fantastique?* Possibly Daudet, remembering the precepts of De Villemessant, his first patron in letters, has preferred to leave it as an anecdote.

In the enjoyment of the appreciation of the most influential editor in Paris, with the power of contributing to one of its most prominent journals, with the prospect of earnings, however precarious, before him, and already possessed of many acquaintances and friendships, the young man, who had come to Paris penniless, friendless, hungry, cold, and ill-clad, may well be described as rescued out of the slough,

and on his way rejoicing. And so he was, though rather because his nature was a hopeful one, because he was young, because he had confidence in himself, and because this confidence filled him with courage, than because there was any reason for happiness in his actual circumstances. His contributions to the *Figaro* were few, because he would work slowly, and revise and re-write and re-write again, and money was accordingly terribly scarce in the garret by the church of Saint Germain des Prés. The remuneration, at the usual rate of four sous a line, was inadequate, for at that rate a man must write many lines if he is to earn enough sous to clothe himself, shoe himself, feed and warm himself, and Alphonse Daudet could not find it in himself to write lines merely because they represented sous. So in consequence his clothes got very shabby, his boots yawned at the toes, and he was often hungry and almost always cold. Insufficiency of diet affected his digestion, exposure injured his lungs. As after-events showed, his privations, had he continued to endure them, would have killed him. He was marked out for an early grave, and the nightingales of the cemetery were already preparing to sing of the melancholy death of a poet who died from want before he came to manhood, when one day, as he was sitting at his table 'poetising,' having fasted for

twenty-four hours, with an old blanket tied round him for warmth, there came a knock at his garret door, and a messenger presented himself from his Excellency the President of the Legislative Body, by command of the Empress.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BY COMMAND OF THE EMPRESS.

A FEW days previously Alphonse Daudet had been out on an excursion in the woods of Meudon with his friend Racinet, the draughtsman, who frequently accompanied him when playing truant from his writing-table. The two young men had filled their pockets with bread and cheese, and carried one of the blankets off Daudet's bed with them as a covering for the night, which they meant to spend out in the forest. Long after nightfall, as they were walking in the moonlight by the side of a hedge, Daudet was suddenly startled by hearing the sound of a wild laugh close behind him, and, curiously enough, Racinet had heard it too. There was nobody in sight, yet the laugh was not one of the voices of the forest, but a clear human, if weird, cachinnation. After looking round in vain to see whence this sound proceeded, the two young men continued

their walk. Presently the laugh was heard again, and as they walked on seemed to follow closely in their steps. By a sudden impulse both began to run, but the laugh still pursued them. Racinet halted first, and reminded Daudet that there was a lunatic asylum in the neighbourhood, and suggested that there might be somebody on the other side of the hedge. Daudet, now very angry at the fright which he had felt, plunged through the bramble-hedge, tearing his face and hands, but found nobody. Neither he nor Racinet was ever able to understand what caused this laugh, nor whence it proceeded.

Now, it appears—and here again in Daudet's career there is a touch of the fantastic—that on that very night, and at about that very time, there was a reception at the Tuileries, in the course of which one of the brothers Lyonnet recited from the published verses of a young and unknown poet a certain poem telling how two young cousins came to love each other under a plum-tree in an orchard. The Empress was greatly pleased with this poem, and ordered it to be recited over again; and when her wish had been obeyed, she beckoned to the Comte de Morny, and bade him find out who this young poet might be, and what might be his condition. De Morny obeyed, and was soon able to

report that the author of 'Les Prunes' was a young Southerner named Alphonse Daudet, who was living in great distress in a garret in the Rue Bonaparte. The Empress then expressed her pleasure that something should be done to assist so talented a young man, and that is why at a very critical moment in Alphonse Daudet's career there came to him in the Rue Bonaparte a messenger from his Excellency the President of the Legislative Body, better known as Charles Augustus Louis Joseph, Comte de Morny. The message was to the effect that his Excellency would be pleased to receive Monsieur Alphonse Daudet at the Presidency of the Legislature, there to make to him a communication of some importance.

It is needless to say that Alphonse Daudet kept the appointment. He was duly received, and one of the first questions which De Morny put to him was on what income he thought he could live in comfort and work free from all embarrassment. Alphonse Daudet mentioned a sum which made De Morny smile. He then offered the young man a place in the offices of the Presidency, a pure sinecure, to which a handsome salary was attached —the post of *attaché du cabinet*.

'But,' said Daudet proudly, 'I am a Legitimist.'

The Comte de Morny smiled again.

'The Empress is even more Legitimist than you are,' he said.

Daudet found nothing more to say against his good fortune, and accepted the post. De Morny fixed the date on which he was to enter upon his new functions, and as he dismissed him, he remarked with the same quiet smile:

'And don't you think that you had better have your hair cut?'

Daudet thought not, and continued to wear it long, as he still wears it to-day, in spite of repeated representations from his chief. 'It was the only point on which we ever disagreed,' he relates.

'I passed at once,' he said to the writer, when speaking of this point in his career, 'from the most dingy Bohemianism to a butterfly life, tasting all that there is of pleasure and luxury in existence. From the age of twenty-one I only knew happiness. I may say that I was too happy. I am paying for it now. . . .' Then he added: 'I believe that people always have to pay for what they have done and for what they have enjoyed, and that therein lie justice and compensation for all, even on earth. . . . Everybody's account is settled on earth. Of that I am sure.'

Having some weeks to spare before entering on his appointment, Daudet hastened South to com-

municate to his friends, by word of mouth, the news of his marvellous good fortune. His first visit was to Privas, where he stayed with his brother Ernest, who, when he heard that De Morny had become his brother's protector, 'saw the future in rose-colour.' After spending some weeks with Ernest, Alphonse travelled to Nîmes, to bid his mother share their hopes. From Nîmes he proceeded to Fontvielle, near Arles, in Provence, to the house of some friends, hard by which was the famous windmill which gave its name to the famous series of 'Lettres de mon Moulin,' many of which were, indeed, written there.

It was whilst staying at this house at Fontvielle, so admirably described in 'Trente Ans de Paris,' that Daudet made the acquaintance of Frederic Mistral, the Provençal poet, for whom his affection and admiration have never since wavered. Mistral was living then, as now, in a small cottage in the village of Maillane, between Arles and Avignon, and Daudet has often told the writer of the ruses by which he used to induce Mistral to leave his bed—for he retires early—and come to Avignon for a revel. 'I used to talk and talk until his imagination was so worked upon that he would sit up in his bed and say, "Let's go to Avignon." Then with infinite precaution he would dress, lest he should

wake the good-wife sleeping in the next room, and we would steal out of the house on tiptoe. There was a long walk across the plains to the station, and all the way I had to talk and talk lest his courage should fail him and he should return home. But as soon as we were in the train and on our way to Avignon I said nothing more.' Through Mistral, Daudet came to know the other poets of the Felibrige—Aubanel, Ansélme Mathieu, Roumanille, and the rest of the singers of Provence. They were all poets together, and there was no other subject of conversation between them but poetry, in discussions animated by the generous wine of the Château des Papes. Aubanel would often burst out into song—his favourite composition, 'La Vénus d'Arles'—and all would join in the chorus. It was in the graveyard of Aliscamps, near Arles, that one day Aubanel read out to Daudet and Mistral his drama in verse, 'Le Pain du Péché,' which was produced in 1888 at the Théâtre Libre in Paris. Mistral and Daudet were lying on one old tomb, Aubanel read as he lay on another. What a change from the Brasserie des Martyrs and the stews of the Latin Quarter!

'Daudet,' writes De Goncourt in his diary, 'spoke to me to-day of his youth in this land of the sun in the midst of these beautiful and brilliant girls, and how he consorted with Aubanel, singing "La

Vénus d'Arles" as he walked ; with the great Mistral, haranguing the peasants when under the influence of wine, drolly eloquent, never hoarse ; with the painter Grivolas. . . . A happy youth, entirely given up to the sensual happiness of living, in this land of light, of love, and of the wine of the Château des Papes.'

De Goncourt elsewhere records the opinion which Mistral has formed of Alphonse Daudet's talents, holding him to be a 'man of illusions and disillusions, combining the scepticism of an old man with the credulity of a child.'

After a few weeks spent in a life so entirely congenial to his nature, Alphonse Daudet, no doubt reluctantly, retraced his steps to Paris, under circumstances very different from those in which he had first journeyed thither.

Immediately on his return to Paris he entered upon his new functions. 'My friends of that time,' he says, 'know what a figure I cut as a grave political person. The Administration also must have preserved a strange souvenir of that fantastic employé with the Merovingian locks, who was always the last to come to his work and the first to leave it ; who never went upstairs to the Duke except to ask for leave of absence.'

However this may be, it is certain that De Morny had a great liking for his young protégé, for very

shortly after Daudet's entrance into the service he granted his request that one of two places which were vacant in the office should be bestowed on Ernest. The other was already promised to Ludovic Halévy. Ernest has described his first interview with De Morny. Alphonse had summoned him to Paris, and had told him that the President would receive him at seven o'clock on the following morning. Ernest went in dress clothes and white gloves, and had to wait several hours in a wonderful Chinese drawing-room. He was at last discovered famishing, by Madame de Morny, who appeared to him at the time as 'a blonde profile in the smoke of a cigarette.' She appears to have informed her husband of his presence, for 'he entered suddenly, in a tight-fitting blue velvet jacket, with a black cap on his bald head.

'"Who are you? What are you doing there?"

'I gave my name.

'"Oh, my poor fellow! I had forgotten all about you. Well, your brother has spoken to me about you. You want a post as secretary. It appears that you are familiar with political questions. You are appointed. Go and see M. Valette, the Secretary-General. He will introduce you to M. Denis de Lagarde, your future chief."

'The audience had not lasted three minutes.'

The post of *secrétaire-redacteur*, to which Ernest had thus been appointed, had attached to it a salary of five thousand five hundred francs, rising to seven thousand francs a year. Till then Ernest had been earning, by most laborious industry, a maximum of two hundred francs a month. He might well be delighted. Did ever a single poem bring such fortune with it as did 'Les Prunes'?

Alphonse Daudet was at this time relieving the tedium of his short office hours by literary composition. Whilst continuing to contribute occasional tales and sketches to the *Figaro*, he had now turned his attention to the stage. It happened that the head of his department, M. Ernest l'Epine, had also a taste for play-writing, and what was more natural than that the two should collaborate? The first result of this collaboration was a play in one act, entitled 'La Dernière Idole.' It was continued as long as the two remained in De Morny's Cabinet—that is to say, until the Duke's death in 1865—and not without success. With the exception of M. l'Epine, who afterwards distinguished himself in journalism under the pseudonym of 'Quatrelles,' Daudet has collaborated with nobody, unless the labours of the professional playwrights, who dramatized certain of his novels — 'Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné,' the 'Nabab,' and 'Sapho'—may be

styled collaboration. 'Whatever fruits this collaboration with M. l'Epine may have yielded,' writes Ernest Daudet, 'it did not convince Alphonse Daudet of the efficacy of working in literary production with a partner. He is persuaded that of two writers engaged on the same book or drama, however honourable they may be, one is always defrauded in the allotment of the moral reward of their joint labours, and since that time he has abandoned all experiments of this kind.'

Though now wholly rescued from the slough, the evil effects of the privations which he had endured during his first years in Paris continued to make themselves felt. Towards the end of 1861 he fell ill of an affection of the chest, and began to spit blood. De Morny heard of this, and sent for his protégé. 'I must appoint you sub-prefect somewhere down in the South,' he said to Daudet. 'You are very young, and you will not cut your hair, but that won't matter.' Then, seeing that it was no laughing matter, he granted the young secretary a leave of absence. 'You had better go to Algeria,' he said, 'since the doctor recommends it.' This advice was accompanied by a handsome gift of money to pay the expenses of the tour. 'Write to me once a month, to tell me how you are progressing,' added the Duke, as he dismissed him.

'He had had the fortune,' writes Emile Zola, speaking of Daudet, 'to win a protector and a friend in M. de Morny, who had attached him to his Cabinet. His seduction was already making itself felt. And this word "seduction" is the right word to use; later on he seduced his friends, he seduced the public, he seduced all who approached him.' One who was the intimate friend of De Morny has told the writer that the statesman's affection and esteem for Alphonse Daudet surprised all who knew him, cold, cynical, and sceptical as he was.

'One day,' continues Emile Zola, 'Daudet fell ill; the doctors said that it was an affection of the chest, and he was forced to start for Algeria. This was again fortunate for him; out of evil came good in his favoured hands. His stay in Algeria completed his childhood in Provence; horizons of sunlight opened out before him, and he retained a remembrance of them; the songs of the Arabs lulled him, blending in him a touch of roughness with the sweetness of Provençal poetry. There may be found even to this day in his works the great impressions of this period in his life; the long voyages, the ports where ships lie sleeping, the perfumes of exotic countries, bright colours and life in the open air in sun-bathed lands.'

Daudet himself has often related what a great

influence this journey exercised not only on himself, but on his work. Doubtless it gave him, at least in some degree, the sense of colour, in which, till then, he had been deficient. This deficiency may be noticed to a certain extent in all his works. His descriptions appeal to the ear rather than to the eye. 'Daudet tells me,' relates De Goncourt, 'that he is much more affected by the noise, by the sound of beings and things, than by their appearance. . . . And, as a matter of fact, his shortsightedness is almost of the nature of an infirmity.'

He was accompanied on this voyage by one of his Provençal friends, who afterwards served him as the original of the illustrious Tartarin of Tarascon. Like Tartarin, the two young men sailed for Algeria with a perfect arsenal of weapons, as though bent on the destruction of all the lions of Atlas. They made their headquarters at Algiers. 'In the mere act of speaking of it,' he says, 'I see it all again. I am once more there ; I wander amongst the bazaars of Algiers in a *chiaro-oscuro* which smells of musk, of amber, of suffocated roses, and of warm wool ; the guzlas drone with their three strings in front of the small Tunisian glass-cupboards, with their arabesques of mother-o'-pearl, whilst the waters of the fountain falling on the tiles of the *patio* tinkle with a fresh note. . . . And again I wander through

Le Sahel, the orange-groves of Blidah, La Chiffa, the brook of the monkeys, Milianah and its green slopes, its gardens all entangled with sunflowers, with fig-trees, and with bottle-gourd plants like our Provençal farmhouses.'

At other times, riding on muleback with a flask of cod-liver-oil, prescribed by the Paris doctors, slung over his shoulders, he used to explore the surrounding country, crossing the mountains, visiting the Arab chiefs, and taking long excursions into the interior. His doctor had ordered him a complete rest, but perhaps never at any time was his activity more prodigious. Each fresh impression, each new idea that came to him, was carefully noted down in those little note-books which have all his life formed the foundation of his books, so that when he returned to Paris he brought back with him a large amount of material. To what good use this was put may be estimated by those who have read his Tartarin series, the Arab stories and sketches in 'Contes de Lundi,' and the descriptions of Algerian scenes in 'Lettres de mon Moulin' and 'Trente Ans de Paris.'

It was down in the valley of Chélif, in the extreme south of Algeria, that, on February 5, 1862, Daudet, whilst resting from the fatigues of a hunting expedition in an Arab's tent, received the

news that his first play, written in collaboration with M. l'Epine, had been produced the night before with great success at the Odéon Theatre. This news came in a telegram from his brother Ernest, couched in the following words: 'Play produced yesterday; great success. Rousseil and Tisserant magnificent.' He has described how, wishing to make others share his triumph and his joy, he endeavoured to explain the purport of this telegram to the Arabs around him—a difficult task, seeing that he barely knew twenty words of Arabic, and his hearers not a score of French words. It was this telegram that decided him to bring his holiday to a close, and he at once set out for Paris, which he had regretted even in the midst of his wonderful life in Africa, anxious to satisfy himself with his own eyes of the success of this first effort, and to enjoy his triumph in the city where it had been won.

'La Dernière Idole,' a drama in one act, was produced for the first time at the Odéon Theatre on February 4, 1862. It represents how an old man married to a young wife discovers, by reading a letter delivered by the postman during his wife's absence at church, that some years previously, and for a considerable length of time, she had been unfaithful to him with a young man, his intimate

friend, who had lived in their house for several years. In a long, an over-long soliloquy the unhappy old man expresses his grief, his indignation; but, 'poor Othello of seventy,' it is borne in upon him that his tears and his anger are ridiculous, and that if he needs must tell his sorrow to anyone, 'death is there, the only confidant worthy of his grief.' Madame Ambroix returns, and her husband at once taxes her with her crime. She confesses it, and after alternating between violent anger and intense sorrow, Ambroix rushes out, determined to leave the scene of his wife's infamy. He presently returns. He has been to the church, and a voice has told him that God has pardoned his wife, and he also is ready to pardon her. But as the curtain falls he cries bitterly, 'My poor idol—my poor and last idol!' The part of Ambroix was played by M. Tisserant, that of Madame Ambroix by Madame Rousseil, and the third part, that of a postman, by M. Etienne. The theatre was crowded with a brilliant audience, as it was known in Paris that the two authors of the piece were the friends and protégés of De Morny. The President of the Legislative Body was there in person, and with him was Madame de Morny, who applauded so violently that she broke her fan. Indeed, everybody was most enthusiastic about the piece, so simple, so

new, and yet so profound, and the applause was general. Even the old playwrights, who might be heard to say that this was no playwriting, were carried away by the pathos of an irremediable misfortune, and could be seen applauding as violently as the rest. Paul de Saint-Victor, afterwards Inspector-General of Fine Arts, and at that time one of the most influential dramatic critics in Paris, made his hands sore in leading the applause.

On alighting from the train in Paris on his return from Algeria, in spite of the fatigue of his long journey, Daudet immediately drove off to the Odéon, reaching it just in time to be present at the performance. 'Certainly, the telegram had only told the truth in saying that my little play was meeting with enormous success. In the meantime I, the author, wished myself a hundred fathoms beneath the earth. I found my play, which the good people around me were applauding, infamous and odious. Oh misery! was this what I had dreamed of—this fat man, who, to appear paternal and virtuous, had made his head up to look like Beranger? . . . I was unjust, of course. Tisserant and Rousseil, both artists of great merit, were acting as well as the play could be acted, and their performance contributed in no small degree to my success. But the disillusion was too great, and the difference

between what I had seemed to write and what was now being exhibited was too wide. . . . What a relief it was when the curtain fell ; and how quickly I hurried away, skirting the walls, with my collar turned up, ashamed and furtive like a thief!'

In 'Un Soir de Première' in his 'Contes du Lundi,' Alphonse Daudet has described his sensations on the nights of the first production of his pieces. Speaking to the writer on this characteristic nervousness of his, he said: 'I am so nervous that I can never be present at any of the first productions of my plays. I always go as far away from the theatre as possible. It is only on the following morning that I learn whether the play has been successful or not, and this generally from the manner of my concierge. If it has been a success she is most respectful; if the papers have informed her that her lodger has scored a failure, there is pity blended with contempt in the way in which she hands me my letters. It is an amusing glimpse into human character that is afforded to a dramatic writer by the conduct of his friends and acquaintances on the morrow of a failure. Some pretend not to see him when they meet him in the street, not knowing what to say to him. Others come and try to console him, literally try to rub lotion on the wounded heart. The servants grow

familiar; and it is when the porter asks you for a box, or a couple of seats in the dress circle, that you know that your work is definitely condemned.'

The success of 'La Dernière Idole' increased De Morny's esteem for the young attaché. He paid him the compliment of inviting him to collaborate with him. De Morny had no small appreciation of his own talents, both in versification and in musical composition, and lightened the strain of his duties to the State by writing now the words, now the music, of various operettas, cantatas, and *saynétés*, which have not survived to this day. 'I have the greatest poetical faculty,' he used to say to Daudet. 'At school, when a difficult task was set, I used to write it in verse.' Daudet no doubt remarked that this, too, had been his habit, and the statement was true in Daudet's case. 'As for music,' the Duke would continue, 'I think I was a born musical composer. It is extraordinary how spontaneously tunes come to me. Listen to this, for instance.' And so saying, he would begin to hum some tune, which was never anything but a reminiscence, and a bad one at that, of some popular tune.

In spite, however, of his estimate of his own capacities, he would often ask Daudet to write him the words of a song or operetta, and on one or two occasions Daudet did so. He relates how one day

he brought De Morny a negro song, the music of which had been written by L'Epine, and how De Morny, L'Epine, and himself rehearsed it in the President's cabinet, whilst Persigny, the Minister of the Interior, and Boitelle, the Prefect of Police, were impatiently waiting in the antechamber for an interview with the Duke on business of the highest importance.

Though tasting the sweets of a butterfly life, as he himself has called it, Daudet did not neglect his work during this period of his career. He continued to collaborate with M. l'Epine, and he continued to contribute to the *Figaro*. Emile Zola has given a portrait of him at this time. 'I remember my first meeting with Alphonse Daudet. It was long ago—something like ten years.' In Daudet's own copy of the book in which this article is reprinted the word 'ten' is scratched out and the word 'twenty' written in in pen and ink. 'He was at that time contributing to a widely read journal. He used to bring an article, receive payment for it, and disappear with the light-heartedness of a young demi-god, having taken refuge in poetry, far from the petty cares of this world. I believe that at that time he was living in the suburbs, in some out-of-the-way corner of the faubourg, in the company of other poets, a whole band of joyous Bohemians. He was

beautiful, with the delicate and nervous beauty of an Arab horse, with abundant hair, a silky beard divided at its point, large eyes, thin nose, and an amorous mouth; and over all an indescribable flood of light, a breath of tender voluptuousness, which bathed the whole face in a smile both sensuous and spiritual. . . . It must not be thought, however, that his position with M. de Morny had given him a stiff and pretentious bearing. He maintained his free-and-easy manners, running about Paris with the ardour of a boy let loose from school, scattering verses and kisses over the four corners of the town.'

At the end of 1862 Daudet's health failed again, and once more the Duke granted him unlimited leave of absence. His doctor, Marchal de Calvi, ordered him to go to Corsica, and here, as in Algeria, he spent his time in taking notes of what he saw. Upon the material thus collected he drew for several of his short stories, as, for instance, 'L'Agonie de la Sémillante,' 'Le Phare des Sanguinaires,' and 'Marie Anto,' as well as for the descriptions of Corsica and Corsican political intrigues which are to be found in 'Le Nabab.' Although Daudet wrote no more verse, he nursed the poetry within him. Thanks to this precaution, he was in later life able to steer clear of the

excessive brutality which characterizes the works of some of his contemporaries, to keep alive his love for the beautiful, and always to avoid any coarseness of language or of imagery. If, on the other hand, it occasionally prompted him to rhapsody, which to some of the readers of his novels may be distasteful, this is but a little evil in the midst of much good.

From Corsica he went to Sardinia, but seems to have brought no notes back except what sufficed him afterwards to write two exquisite pages on 'Bouillabaisse.' The reason of this was no doubt that he had no knowledge of Italian. Daudet is no linguist, although he can read English and Italian with no very great difficulty. De Goncourt will have it, by the way, that it is very difficult for a man who speaks several languages to write his own language well—that he loses the sense of the value of words. This is certainly true; and may not the treachery of translators be but the result of this deterioration of their knowledge of their own language?

Both on the way to Corsica and on the return journey Alphonse Daudet spent several days at Fontvielle, renewing acquaintance with Mistral, Aubanel, and the rest of the *félibres*, drinking Château des Papes, singing songs, or dancing the *farandole* with the village lads and lasses. And

when 'some old woman seemed to criticise the freedom of our manners, the handsome Mistral, proud as King David, would say from the height of his grandeur: 'Let them be, good woman; let them be; everything is allowed to poets.' And then, confidentially winking at the old woman as, dazzled and respectful, she bowed, he would add: 'Es nautré qué fasen li saumé ('Tis we who write the Psalms).'

Daudet's admiration for Mistral is unbounded. In his 'Lettres de mon Moulin' may be found an exquisite sketch of this great poet of the Provençal tongue. 'Oh, the good poet!' cries Daudet, 'and with what perfect truth might Montaigne have written of Mistral: "Souvienne-vous de celuy à qui comme on demandoit à quoy faire il se peinoit si fort, en un art qui ne pouvoit venir à la cognoissance de guére des gens. J'en ay assez de peu, repondict-il. J'en ay assez d'un. J'en ay assez de pas un."' There is no one, indeed, to whom these words could be more fittingly applied than to Daudet himself, for he has always toiled hard at his art, and that without thought of the public. Well might he also say with regard to admirers, 'I have enough with very few. I have enough with one. I have enough with none.' The admirers have come in their thousands, all the same.

The winter of 1863 was again spent away from Paris, though this time Daudet only yielded to an irresistible longing to visit the South once more. His health had apparently been altogether re-established, and it was not until several years later that he was to reap the harvest sown in privations of every kind. It was during this winter of 1863 that he more particularly filled his note-books with material which was afterwards used in his pictures of the South and his descriptions of the Southern Frenchmen. It was during this period that he frequented his old windmill, which never, as suggested by the purchase-deed which serves as preface to the 'Lettres de mon Moulin,' ever really belonged to him, though he often thought of purchasing it. 'My windmill never belonged to me,' he writes. 'But that did not prevent me from spending long days of reverie and remembrance there.' Elsewhere, speaking of his life at this time, he says: 'I do not know where this taste for deserted places, for a wild man's life, which has been in me since I was a child, came from, so dissimilar is it to the exuberance of my nature, unless, indeed, it be at the same time the physical need to repair, by a fast of words, by an abstinence from cries and gestures, that terrible waste of all his being which the Meridional practises. In any case, I owe

a great deal to these mental retreats, and none was more salutary to me than my old windmill in Provence.'

It was, however, not until three years later—that is to say, in 1866—that Alphonse Daudet began to write from the impressions gathered here. The 'Lettres de mon Moulin' first appeared over the signature 'Marie-Gaston' in a Parisian journal. In the following year he revisited Provence with his bride, and on his return to Paris resumed the series in the *Figaro*, to which, amongst other stories, he contributed 'Le Vieux' and the humorous 'L'Elixir du Père Gaucher,' which is one of the best specimens of Daudet's tender irony. It tells how a loutish monk brought fortune to the monastery in which he lived by the manufacture of an elixir, after the fashion of the liqueur de la Grande Chartreuse, for which he had the recipe of an old aunt. But in tasting the liqueur to gauge its quality Le Père Gaucher gradually becomes a drunkard, and shocks the monastery with his ribald and festive songs. The holy brothers, however, compound matters with Heaven, and offer up the *Oremus*, whilst Father Gaucher is polluting his soul in the interests of the community, so that he may be saved without ceasing to enrich the monastery. These stories and sketches were collected into one volume,

which was published by Hetzel, Jules Verne's publisher, in 1869. It had a small sale at that time—about two thousand copies—but since Daudet's reputation has become universal, few of his books are more asked for. It certainly contains some of his best, because his most characteristic, work.

On his return to Paris in the beginning of 1864, Daudet wrote a comedy in one act entitled 'Les Absents,' which was performed for the first time on October 26, at the Opéra Comique, with music by Ferdinand Poise. It did not meet with any great success.

Not much more successful was his comedy in one act, written in collaboration with M. l'Epine, which was performed for the first time on April 8, 1865, at the Théâtre Français. This play had originally been called 'Le Lys,' but on the representations of the 'Censure' the authors changed this title to that of 'L'Œillet Blanc.' It is a story of a young Marquis who ventures into France in spite of the law against the *émigrés*, risking his life thus in order to pick a flower for his lady-love, who is also in exile in England, and has bidden him gratify her whim to have a flower from her former home. The young Marquis is detected by the daughter of the *conventionnel* in charge of the château, but charms her into silence. He makes

good his escape with the coveted flower in spite of the Republican zeal of an officious varlet, whose part, it may be mentioned, was taken by Coquelin aîné. With the exception of 'La Dernière Idole' and 'L'Arlésienne,' produced for the first time at the Vaudeville in 1872, on the same stage where five years previously his 'Le Frère Aîné,' written in collaboration with M. l'Epine, had been performed, Alphonse Daudet cannot be said to have obtained any very great success with his dramatic writings. 'Apropos of this part of his work,' writes Ernest Daudet, 'I have often heard people expressing surprise that his pieces did not meet with the same success with the public as his books. It is certain that he never scored one of those scenic victories which make the fortune of an author or of a theatre. I am not speaking of the plays taken from his novels. Those only came upon the stage protected by the recollection of the fame they had enjoyed in their first form. As to the other plays which he wrote, with the exception of "La Dernière Idole," they brought their author more trouble than satisfaction.' This was written after the production of 'L'Arlésienne,' which at first did not meet with that reception which was accorded to it at various revivals which have since been given—first at the Gymnase Theatre, under the direction of Koning,

with Madame Hading in the principal part, and quite recently at Porel's ill-fated theatre in the Rue Auber. Daudet's enemies are accustomed to say that it is Bizet's music, and not Daudet's prose, that people go to hear; but this is mere malice. Certainly Bizet's score is admirable, and, indeed, first attracted attention to this great and ill-fated musician; but the qualities of 'L'Arlésienne' in point of feeling, language, colour, and development, if not of intense dramatic action, cannot be denied. From the point of view of the theatrical manager, at least, this play has been a great success. It was Porel who not long ago told the writer that 'L'Arlésienne' had drawn considerably over a million francs from the purses of the theatre-going public.

It is unnecessary to consider what may be the reasons why, with these two notable exceptions, the dramatic work of Alphonse Daudet has not met with the success accorded to his novels. Such an analysis could only be the repetition of all that has been written and said as to the difficulties which novelists, as such, seem to experience in writing for the stage. It may, however, be pointed out that amongst novelists Daudet, 'more affected by the noise, the sound of beings and things, than by their appearance,' has peculiar and characteristic

difficulties to contend with. It was in this year, 1865, that Daudet lost his friend and protector, M. de Morny. He was present during the last moments of the Richelieu-Brummel, as he has called him, and the description of the death of Mora in 'Le Nabab' is a very faithful account of an event which no doubt contributed in a large measure to the downfall of the Empire.

'My brother was present at the death of the Duc de Morny,' writes Ernest, 'and followed hour by hour this intimate drama which, by reason of the great place held by the dying man, was soon to be transformed into a historical tragedy. He saw sickness enter the palace; he saw death hang the walls with black draperies. He noted down from life the bewilderment of the politicians and the jobbers, in whose eyes this event took the proportions of a catastrophe. He heard the comments of the servants, wavering between their pride at having had so powerful a master, the regret at losing him, and the hurry to secure new places. He helped to destroy the private papers, the voluminous correspondence, documentary evidence of human baseness, which the dead man did not wish to leave behind him. He entered the death-chamber just as the embalmer was leaving it.'

After the death of the Duc de Morny, unwilling

to serve a new master who very probably would not have understood his nature, and for every reason anxious to regain entire independence, now that the first difficulties of a literary career had been successfully overcome, Daudet resigned his position in the Presidency of the Legislature, and once more, with his pen as his only weapon, threw himself into the struggle for life and fame. There was certainly every encouragement for him to take a step which in other men might have been considered foolhardy. Apart from the fact that his talents were now recognised, and that his name commanded respect in the literary mart, Daudet could find in his astonishing good fortune the security and confidence needed for this blow for liberty. Indeed, no other career has been marked by fortune so persistent. Within a few months of his arrival, penniless and unknown, in Paris, he finds a publisher who—a thing unheard of in the annals of publishing—produces his first volume at his own charges. One of the poems in this volume attracts the attention of the Empress, and secures him the friendship and patronage of the most influential politician in France. He is at once, and at a most critical moment in his career, appointed to a highly remunerated sinecure, where he has all leisure to continue his literary work free

from all embarrassment. Thanks to this circumstance, as well as to the protection which he enjoys, he has at the age of twenty-two the satisfaction of seeing a play of his produced on the stage of the second theatre in France—a play which meets with wonderful though well-deserved success. He is able to assist his brother by securing for him an excellent position, and leads a butterfly life, with absolute freedom, and the privilege of indulging his inherent taste for long journeys to the lands of the sun. At the age of twenty-five a play of his is performed on the stage of the first theatre in Europe, a success for which most men have to wait until their hair has grown gray; and at this age, thanks to the appreciation of the most influential middleman in Paris, his literary wares are assured of a certain and advantageous market.

Need it be added that, in the midst of their good fortune, Alphonse and Ernest did not forget their parents? No sooner was their position assured than 'the hearth was re-established.'

## CHAPTER XIII.

### 'LE PETIT CHOSE.'

It may once more be said that it was characteristic of Alphonse Daudet that, having turned his back for good on the restraints of a life where there were duties, however slight, and obligations, however small, he should gallop off in a wild fever of delight at his liberty regained, like any boy let loose from school.

It was characteristic of him that on the day when it no longer behoved him to turn his steps towards the office in which for some years his activity had been limited, and the wide world lay open before his feet, he should be seized with an immense desire of slaking his thirst for liberty, of exercising this activity to his heart's content.

It so happened that just at this time there was amongst the friends whose acquaintance he had made at that home of incapacity, the Brasserie des Martyrs, in the days when he was wallowing in the

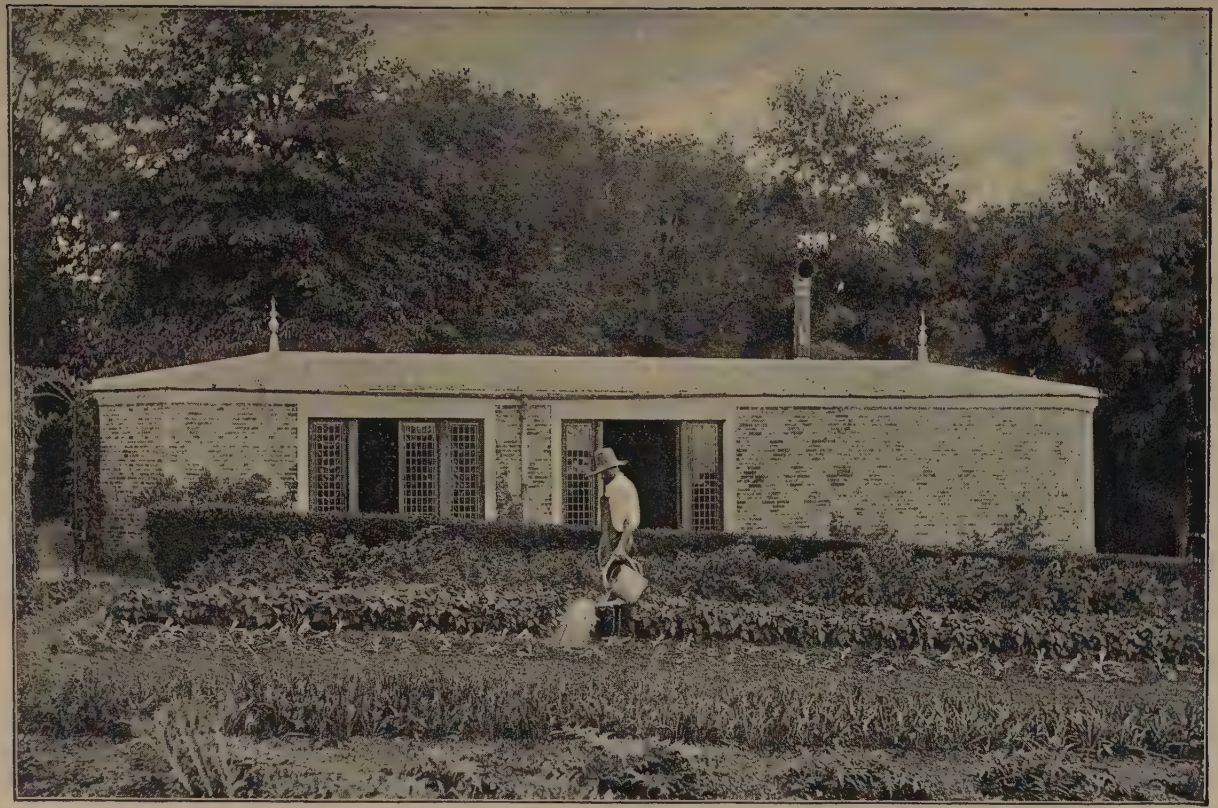
slough of a futile Bohemianism, a certain Alfred Delvau, who was also hankering after a debauch of fresh air and free motion. This Alfred Delvau, certainly one of the most regrettable of Murger's victims, was a man of letters with a considerable sense of style and a very appreciable quality of imagination. It is true that his horizon, as may be noticed with certain Parisians, was bounded by that of Paris; but in the matter of chronicling, describing, and recording the life of Paris and of such notable Parisians as came within his ken, this unhappy man had in his life-time, and has had since his death, no rivals worth mention. He had the civicism of Aurélien Scholl, the taste for social profundities of De Goncourt and Zola; and it may be said of him that none knew better than himself the life which seethes on the Parisian boulevards. He died a very poor, and even hungry, man; and those he left behind him, as the writer knows, have no other legacy than hunger; but many of his little books, for he wrote hurriedly with his eyes fixed on the 'Finis' and its concomitant remuneration, are to-day sought after by the collectors of books concerning the history of Paris and of recent Parisians. Thus the writer recently disbursed the sum of one hundred francs for his little life of 'Gérard de Nerval,' with the

*eau forte* of G. Staal, originally issued at three francs by the publishing house of Bachelin-Deflorenne. His 'Dictionnaire de la Langue Verte' is the standard work for those inquisitive in matters of philology; and his 'Mémoires d'une Honnête Fille,' also with an *eau forte* by G. Staal, reached a seventh edition even in its author's lifetime. There may also be mentioned, among the works of this writer, a study of 'Henry Murger et la Bohème,' which no money can to-day procure, 'Les Heures Parisiennes,' with twenty-five *eaux-fortes* by Emile Bennasit, and a very pretty study entitled 'Les Sonneurs de Sonnets.' This Alfred Delvau, then, and Alphonse Daudet, both having money in their purses and a desire for fatigue in their legs, met at the Brasserie des Martyrs, and, over beer and tobacco, planned out an excursion on foot which should be wonderful in point of things seen and countries explored.

Alfred Delvau has described this journey in a book called 'Du Pont des Arts au Pont de Kehl,' but has spoiled these 'Notes de Voyage' with absurd flourishes. He speaks of Alphonse Daudet as 'Fortunio,' and there is much nonsense of this kind in the little book, which, in spite of its defects, still comforts its present publishers on stock-taking days.

'Not many years ago,' says Alphonse Daudet, without flourish of any kind, 'I went on a journey through Alsace, which has remained one of my most pleasant recollections. Not an insipid journey in a railway train of which one remembers nothing but glimpses of landscape intersected by rails and telegraph-wires, but a journey on foot, with a knapsack on my back, a stout stick in my hand, and a comrade who was not too talkative. . . . What a charming way to travel! How everything that one sees remains fixed in one's memory.' Thus equipped, Daudet, with the not too talkative Delvau, walked through France and Alsace, which was then France also, into Germany and Switzerland. Of their progress through the Reichsland Daudet writes: 'I remember all my impressions of this country which we have lost, so full of that savour of the unforeseen which arises from long walks in a beautiful country, where the woods rise like green curtains behind peaceful villages, swathed in sunlight; where in the turn of a mountain one sees church-steeples, factories traversed by brooks, saw-mills, wind-mills, and the startling and piercing note of an unfamiliar costume suddenly rising from the fresh greenery of the plains.'

And in connection with this quotation let it be observed that, let an author polish never so carefully,



EXTERIOR OF THE PAVILION.

*To face page* 286.

a too great familiarity with language will always place stumbling-blocks in his way. How can the sight of an 'unfamiliar costume' be described as *une note éclatante?* one asks, just as one wonders at the tautology of the 'furtive, like a thief' of a previous quotation from another careful stylist.

'Every morning,' continues Daudet, 'we were afoot at daybreak.' They sought untrodden ways, following no Baedeker itinerary.

'With a companion almost as mad as myself,' he writes elsewhere, 'I had tramped through Alsace, Switzerland, the Duchy of Baden—a real pedlar's journey, with a knapsack on my back, covering leagues by the score, avoiding the cities, of which we only wished to see the gates, and always following little side-roads without knowing whither they might lead us.'

Neither Delvau nor Daudet could speak German, but with the aid of a small dictionary they had composed certain indispensable phrases for asking for what they needed in the inns. In order not to forget these phrases, they had set them to a kind of tune, and on entering an inn would begin singing a couplet somewhat after this fashion :

'Wir wollen trinken Bier,
Wir wollen trinken Bier.
Wir wollen, Ja, wir wollen,
Ja, wir wollen trinken Bier.'

Or, again, 'Wir wollen essen Kaes,' and so on. One wonders what the staid and unimaginative German Wirtin must have thought of these two wild-looking Frenchmen as they burst singing into the Gasthäuser. 'Was für verrückte Kerle!' must often have been exclaimed after their departure.

One night in a forest near Bussang, in the Vosges, when, having lost their way, they were preparing to sleep in the open-air, and were discussing the risk they might be running of being attacked—for the forest was reputed to be unsafe—they were startled by hearing a tune from 'Norma' breaking through the almost sinister silence of the night. It was a man with a barrel-organ, who took them for brigands, a supposition indeed warranted by their appearance, and prepared to defend himself with a knife, when Daudet produced a two-franc piece and calmed his apprehensions. He told them he was going to Bussang to the fête, and then Daudet asked him if he would care to earn the two francs by playing them all the tunes in his organ. The man consented, and lying stretched on the grass, smoking their pipes, the two mad poets listened to the music in the dark. When he had finished his pieces, Delvau gave him another franc, and bade him play as he continued on his way. The man

did so, and Daudet says that he has retained a vivid recollection of the impression produced upon him by the sound of this music gradually dying away in the trees. The incident is trivial, but it illustrates how Daudet has ever run after strange sensations in a life which has been one continued quest after romance. A fondness for music has always characterized him. He is never happier in his leisure-hours than when his wife or a friend will play to him. He himself is a pianist of some merit, though of late his fingers have refused the task of playing. He has always been a singer, and even to-day, when in a merry mood, will burst out into some Provençal or Breton song. On one occasion, at one of Madame Daudet's receptions, there being a good pianist amongst the guests, the whole evening, and most of the night, too, was spent in music and singing. It was interesting to watch the vivifying effect which this diversion produced on Daudet, who usually becomes exhausted after dinner. On this occasion he seemed full of life, and his eyes sparkled as he waved his hands in beating time, or, throwing back his head, sang to his friend's accompaniment. One of the songs, a song about a cemetery, by Gabriel Vicaire, he asked for over and over again, but a *farandole* tune seemed to give him the greatest pleasure.

His preference is for French and Italian music, and he does not, accordingly, share the general enthusiasm which at present exists for Wagner in France in any high degree. Wagner, on the other hand, had a great admiration for Daudet both as a man and as an author, and on one occasion, showing Alphonse Daudet's portrait to Fourcaud, said that there was the Frenchman whom he liked the best.

Their common fondness for music was one of the principal attractions that Daudet found in Tourguéneff. 'I was delighted,' he records, 'to hear that Tourguéneff was fond of music. In France men of letters, as a general rule, have a horror for it, painting having enslaved them all. Théophile Gautier, Saint-Victor, Hugo, Banville, Goncourt, Zola, Leconte de Lisle, all hate music. As far as I know, I am the first writer in France who has made a public confession of my ignorance of colours and my passion for notes. This proceeds, no doubt, from my Meridional temperament and my short-sightedness; one sense has developed at the expense of another. In Tourguéneff the taste for music was the result of his Paris education. He had acquired this taste in the *milieu* in which he lived.'

Daudet often speaks of this tour with Delvau as one of the pleasantest recollections of his youth. One drawback to his full enjoyment of it, however,

lay in the fact that Delvau always used to go to bed directly after his supper, just when Daudet was most anxious to wander abroad in quest of those nocturnal sensations which he has always pursued. 'It was not amusing,' he says, 'to sit in our bedroom and watch Delvau sleeping.' He used to spend this time, perhaps more profitably than he would have done had he had a companion fond of late walking, in filling the little note-book which was the principal treasure in his knapsack. One night his wakefulness stood them in good stead. They were sleeping in an inn by the Rhine, and in paying for their supper Daudet had displayed some gold hundred-franc pieces. That night, as he was standing at the window, he overheard two pedlars in the adjoining garret discussing some question in which the words 'Franzosen,' 'schlafen,' and 'Gold' were being repeated. It was evident that a plot was being made to rob them in their sleep. With great difficulty Daudet waked the lethargic Delvau, and with him arranged to give the thieves a strange reception. On stealthily opening the door of the Frenchmen's room the two thieves were startled by a hideous yell, as two wild-looking men came rushing at them, one brandishing a gigantic club, the other armed with a formidable knife. The thieves screamed with terror and turned and ran for their

lives, pursued hotly. It would appear that the innkeeper was in the plot, for he refused to give any assistance in capturing the thieves, who were able to make good their escape.

At another inn—in France this time—the two young men were taking their humble meal of bread and cheese and beer in the kitchen, when the landlord came up to them and said that some of the finest gentlemen in the district were dining in the parlour, after a day's shooting; that they had seen them come in, and would be pleased with their company, if in return they would undertake to amuse them with their tricks—for, of course, they were two mountebanks—after the dinner was over. Delvau was rather indignant, but Daudet urged him to accept. They were not, however, able to keep up the illusion. 'You are no mountebanks,' said Monsieur l'Inspecteur, as soon as he had heard them talk. Everybody wanted to know who and what they might be, but neither Daudet nor Delvau would satisfy them on this point. Daudet amazed the company with his knowledge of Parisian life, and described the recent death of the Duc de Morny, at which, it will be remembered, he was present. The fine gentlemen opened their eyes as they listened whilst this ill-clad, travel-stained youth related what the Empress had said on this or that

occasion, and whilst his equally strange-looking companion talked of the great Ledru-Rollin as though he were on the most familiar terms with him. They pressed them hard to give their names and tell their business, but both refused to gratify them, and, as Daudet says, 'the Marquis de M——, who presided at that dinner, and who pressed his card upon me as we departed, must often have wondered who his mysterious guests of that evening might be.'

It was during this tour that Daudet first felt the sensation of fear, which he often speaks of as the sensation which produces the greatest impression upon him. 'All things around me,' he says, 'become blurred as though enveloped in mist. My body grows cold, whilst, on the other hand, every mental faculty suddenly acquires intense and unusual force.' He adds that he has been very subject to the influence of fear, and that so potent are the effects which it produces in him that he welcomes rather than dreads it. The feeling of fear often comes upon him where no cause is apparent, and he will nurse it rather than shake it off. The subject is one which he is fond of discussing; he is glad to hear from others whether they are subject to this feeling, and under what circumstances it usually comes upon them. The writer remembers

a long summer afternoon at Champrosay which was spent in continued discussion of this subject, when Daudet related the more striking occasions on which he had so been influenced. From what he said it appeared that his periodical fits of fear are the outcome rather of a peculiar nervous organism than the result of terror at actual danger. His conduct during the siege of Paris certainly did not betray timidity.

His experience in this respect — an experience which he qualifies as an invaluable one—was, as stated, acquired during his tour with Delvau, the occasion being whilst mountaineering in Switzerland. 'It was the most precious thing that I brought back from that journey,' he says.

Having in this wise slaked to the full his thirst for liberty and adventure, Alphonse Daudet returned to Paris with the same eagerness with which he had left it. He was delighted with the prospect of entire independence which awaited him there, for he was determined that in the future nothing should stand between him and a life entirely devoted to literature. Immediately on his return to Paris he set to work in writing out from his notes the stories and sketches published and republished under the title 'Lettres de mon Moulin.' At the same time he was working at two dramatic pieces—the 'Frère

Aîné,' alluded to above, in collaboration with L'Epine, and later on in the year at a three-act comedy entitled 'Le Sacrifice,' which was eventually produced at the Vaudeville for the first time on February 11, 1869. It was to finish this comedy in quiet and seclusion that towards the end of 1865 he returned to Provence, taking up his abode on this occasion in a lonely country house on the road between Beaucaire and Nîmes.

'Never,' he says, 'and at no time in my life—not even when, yielding to a caprice for silence and isolation, I have closeted myself in a room in some lighthouse—have I lived so completely alone as I lived there. The house was far away from the highroad, in the fields. Twice a day the farmer's wife—there was a farm attached to the house, but at such a distance that it was out of earshot—used to serve my meals at the end of an immense dining-room, all the windows of which, except one, were closed with shutters. This Provençale, unable to understand what strange business it might be which had brought me down there in the midst of the winter, did not cease to hold me in suspicion and in fear, and used to set down the dishes in a hurry and rush off without speaking or turning round to look at me. And this was the only face that I saw during this hermit's life.'

It was here, and under these circumstances, that Daudet wrote his first novel, 'Le Petit Chose.' At least, it was here that he wrote the first copy of it. For of all Daudet's books at least two, and often three copies have been written before they have been given to the public. His conscientiousness in this respect has already been commented upon ; it is unnecessary to enter into further consideration of the subject. Still, what he relates may be quoted : 'No sooner had I finished the draft of my book than I at once began the second copy, the painful part of my task, so contrary to my nature as an improvisatore, as a troubadour.' And be it noted that at this time, as before he was taken under De Morny's protection, Daudet was absolutely dependent on his pen for his livelihood, so that once more there was inducement for him, especially now that his name commanded attention, to spend less time over his work and to devote to it less care.

However, just as he was commencing to re-write the story, with a view to style and correction, a friend broke in upon his silence, and, with his talk about Paris, aroused in Daudet, the most loyal of the foster-children of Paris, an intense desire to return to the metropolis. This desire, as he has told the writer, has always haunted him during his 'mental retreats,' and on this occasion it broke out

with such violence that the same evening he packed his manuscript in his trunk, and took train back to town. It was not until the following winter that the labour thus interrupted was resumed, this time in a hotel-room on the Place de l'Odéon. This room was the abode of Jean du Boys, already mentioned, where Daudet had taken refuge from the disturbances of his own suburban abode. His primary motive in going to live with Du Boys was that the latter was a writer of the most methodical habits, who allowed nothing to interfere with the production of an allotted daily task. He used to write with his eyes on the clock, which he set up as his taskmaster. Du Boys was a writer of *feuilletons*—that is to say, of serial stories of the kind appreciated by the readers of the small daily papers in Paris—but a man of ambition withal, with a vast conception of 'the cylindrical development of humanity,' which he essayed to set forth in a great philosophical poem, entitled 'Enceldonne.' He was one of the wearers of the three green hats, and went mad and died before the poem was finished. In this room and in this companionship Daudet worked for three months at the second copy of 'Le Petit Chose,' interrupted now and again by poor Du Boys, who would insist on informing him of the weird adventures through which the

heroes of his *feuilleton* were passing, interspersed with disquisitions on the cylindrical movement. Outside, the Latin Quarter raised its foolish voices, but these were never siren-calls for Daudet, who 'sweated hard' that winter.

A man who is a great man in Paris to-day has told the writer that in that winter of 1866-1867 he used to pass almost every night across the Place de l'Odéon on his way home. 'It was sometimes as late as two o'clock in the morning,' he said; 'yet there was always a light in that window of the Hotel Lassus. I often wondered who might be in that room, and what assiduous labour kept him so constantly at his task. I afterwards knew that it was Alphonse Daudet.' Who, wandering about the streets of a great city at nights, has not seen such lights and felt this wonder?

One likes to imagine the interior thus lit up. At one table the placid Du Boys, his face covered by a beard which seemed a mask, with calm deliberation tracing line after line of easy-flowing prose, glancing from time to time at the clock to see how soon the hour of deliverance would strike; at another table a second writer, feverish, restless, now writing hard, now throwing down his pen to stride about the room, now tearing up the written sheets with a gesture of despair, and on such occasions

going to the frosted window to cool his brow and gather thoughts by a long contemplation of the desolate scene without.

It was under these circumstances that the first part of 'Le Petit Chose,' as it is now known to the public, was written. Daudet's marriage interrupted the task, which was not resumed until the honeymoon was passed.

'It was not until the summer came, that, under the shade of the trees of the Château de Vigneux, I once more set to work upon my interminable novel. Six delicious months, far from Paris, at that time all distracted with the Exhibition of 1867, which I refused to visit.' The book was at last finished in the autumn of this year, and was first published in serial form in the *Petit Moniteur*, at that time under the editorship of Paul Dalloz. It was published in volume form some months later by Hetzel, and, says Daudet, 'met with some success, in spite of all its defects.'

The demand for this book appears to have continued, for in 1892 the publisher, Charpentier, found it necessary to issue a new edition. It is, however, one of the least successful, from a market point of view, of Alphonse Daudet's books.

It has the defects of all books in which authors

have endeavoured to relate their experiences at a time in their lives when real experiences have been rare, and yet it is the part in which Daudet describes his own life that the book most closely appeals to the reader. Soured critics like Jules Lemaître have confessed that they have yielded to the charm of 'Little What's-his-name,' whilst Zola, on the other hand, will 'mention its title only, a book which is half *conte*, half *nouvelle*.' The imaginary career of 'Le Petit Chose,' after his arrival in Paris—that is to say, where the author no longer records but invents—reads unsatisfactorily in contrast to the picturesque reality of the first part. From this point onward the book, in its artlessness, is just the book that one would have expected from 'Le Petit Chose' himself. A more experienced writer would not have asked us to believe in the sacrifice of an adventuress, who throws up a luxurious position to go play-acting with a lad whom she does not love; nor that a respectable tradesman of Paris would have bestowed his only daughter, together with an interest in his hardware business, on this same lad after he had seen the error of his ways. And admirable as is the devotion of 'Mother Jacques' in the first part of the book, it is difficult of conception where he is described first as giving up his bride to his younger

brother, and next as working himself to death to support him in the extravagances of his life. The old negress, the servant of the adventuress referred to, is the outcome of the hankering after the fantastic which has been noticed in Daudet's mental organism, and is out of place in a novel which indirectly claims to be a story of real life. On the other hand, the character of 'Le Petit Chose,' undisciplined, not unegotistical, but good at heart, at all times winning by his natural charm and his very weaknesses, is admirably drawn, and the impression is sustained from the beginning of the book to the end. It is one of those books which inspire the reader with a keen desire to know the author, to ascertain how much in his narrative is fact and how much is invention. Daudet himself admits the defects to which allusion has been made. 'I was too young when I wrote this book,' he says. 'A whole part of my existence was at that time too near me; I lacked the necessary distance for seeing it in its true light, and not being able to see, I invented.' To the writer he has often said about 'Le Petit Chose': 'I wish that I had waited. Something very good might have been written on my youth.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MADAME ALPHONSE DAUDET.

As related in the preceding chapter, Alphonse Daudet married in the year 1867. 'A final, a supreme piece of good fortune,' writes Emile Zola, 'awaited him; he married after his return from Algeria, and from that time forward became a respectable citizen, a worker entirely given up to his work. The poet who, till then, had widely scattered his refrains, entered upon a period of maturity and of regular production. Marriage, according to my way of thinking, is the school of the great contemporary producers.'

'How did it happen?' asks Daudet, speaking about his marriage. 'By what witchcraft was the gipsy verily possessed, that I was at that time ensnared, and thrown under a spell? What charm was it that was able to hold fast the eternal caprice?'

Daudet had always said, as a young man, that in

the event of his marrying he should be careful not to select a woman of literary tastes for his wife. He professed a horror of the *bas-bleu* and all her works.

One day, in the summer of 1866, Alphonse met at the house of his parents, who were now living at Ville d'Avray, near Paris, a young lady named Julia Allard, the daughter of parents of pronounced literary tastes. Both M. and Madame Allard were poets, and in collaboration with their daughter had written and published a volume of poems entitled 'Les Marges de la Vie.' On the occasion of her visit to the Daudets' house at Ville d'Avray, Mademoiselle Allard recited one of the poems in this volume, written by herself, a piece called 'Le Tremble.' She was dressed in white, and her appearance, as well as the way in which she recited these verses, produced an immense impression on the young man. As he was afterwards walking back to the station, his sister, who was with him, said: 'Well, I suppose you don't like Mademoiselle Allard; she is too much of a bluestocking for you?' But Daudet shook his head; the *coup de foudre* had operated, and stammeringly he replied that he had no other hope than that that lady should become his wife. A feeling of the same kind existed towards him in Julia Allard, who had

seen him some time previously at the performance of 'Henriette Maréchal,' on the memorable occasion of De Goncourt's defeat at the hands of 'Pipe-en-Bois' and other adversaries of the new order of things in literature. Daudet had attracted especial attention to himself by the enthusiasm he had displayed, and, besides winning a wife, secured for himself on that occasion the precious friendship of M. de Goncourt, who also saw him then and there for the first time.

The marriage took place towards the beginning of 1867, only a few months after the first meeting of the young people, and this marriage, as Emile Zola has said, was for Alphonse Daudet a final and supreme piece of good fortune. 'I was fortunate enough to win her,' he said to the writer, 'and it has been the greatest blessing that has been accorded to me in the course of a most happy and successful life.' The Daudet *ménage* is a living example that an entire dissimilitude in the characters of two spouses may produce great domestic happiness. And certainly the difference is great between Madame Daudet, the typical Northern woman, with her great practical common-sense and uncompromising logic, reserved, undemonstrative, cool and equable, and Alphonse Daudet, capricious, romantic, superstitious, exuberant, guided by impulse rather

than by calculation. The difference between them is all the immense difference that distinguishes the Northern from the Southern Frenchman. In the French Navy, so Daudet relates in 'Jack,' the sailors are divided into Mocos and Ponantais, into Southerners and Northerners. If one may do so without disrespect, one might speak of the Daudet *ménage* as composed of a Moco husband and a Ponantais wife.

So marked is this difference between their two characters, that Daudet has often desired a more active collaboration with his wife. Thus, at the time that he was occupied in dramatizing 'Numa Roumestan,' he suggested to De Goncourt that it would be very interesting if his wife would write the part of Numa's wife, the Northern woman, brought up in monogamous surroundings; whilst he should analyze himself in the part of the Southerner, with the Southerner's *penchant* for polygamy. It may be mentioned, in passing, that the Roumestan *ménage* is an example of the great domestic unhappiness which an entire dissimilitude of character may produce between two spouses, and that in this respect it is the exact contrary of the union of Alphonse Daudet and his wife.

In a private letter in the possession of the writer, Madame Daudet, speaking of her collaboration with

her husband, says that she has always been more a housewife than a writer. Indeed, she seems to possess to the full those qualities which make of the Parisiennes the best housewives in the world, combining with the loyalty of the English wife and the economy, domesticity, and indefatigable activity of the German Haus-frau a taste, a refinement, and an elegance which are rarely met with in other countries. It is not surprising that Daudet was eventually 'buckled down,' to use his own expression, when one considers the comfort and elegance of his home, even in the days when the young couple were in humble circumstances. The Parisienne has the sense of 'home' in a very high degree, though she never talks of it, and although no Frenchman whose name one can recall has set the sentiment to music. She differs from the German Haus-frau in this respect—that she is a wonderful organizer, and finds time for the parlour as well as for the kitchen, in which poor Charlotte is an eternal prisoner. And the Parisienne, not without reason, attaches to the elegancies of life as great an importance as to its necessities. Indeed, she is by nature disposed to give preference to the former. She will put flowers on the mantelpiece before she tucks up her sleeves for the kitchen-range. The first thing that impresses the visitor to

Daudet's house is that it must be under the direction of an admirable housewife, who combines with a very high sense of order the taste and refinement of an artist. Some who visit Daudet for the first time, and come to his house with preconceived ideas of his legendary Bohemianism, are surprised at the scrupulous tidiness that is everywhere displayed. 'What a capital wife he must have!' is the first thought of the visitor.

This impression can only be confirmed in those who are so happy as to spend much time in the society of Madame Daudet. Her constant watchfulness over her husband, her motherly care of the dear invalid, discreet, careful, disguised, but constant, are admirable to behold. Now there is a draughty door to be closed, now a glaring lamp to be shaded, and all these things are done naturally, quietly, without ostentation, as the most obvious duties. In Madame Daudet that womanly devotion which in most women is only one form of feminine egotism is divested of all its irritating attributes, and appears, as indeed is the case, to proceed from a high sense of duty and the promptings of a tender and affectionate nature.

A rare modesty is another characteristic of this admirable woman. She indeed practises self-effacement to a degree which inspires those who

know her worth with actual regret. She listens when she might speak; she contents herself with the part of a Stella, although entitled to the rôle of a Stael. In these days of assertive, noisy, unsexed femininity, she is pre-eminent among the ladies who by their manners reclaim the respect due to their sex. Julia Daudet is the living answer to Sarah Grand. She is Wordsworth's Dorothy, with a note of elegance superadded.

Her charm proceeds from her entire unselfishness. Daudet has recorded in conversation that in the days of straitened circumstances, when he used to take a louis d'or for his minor pleasures from the slender common fund, Julia Daudet from time to time would draw a threepenny-piece for an indispensable omnibus fare. In respect of her requirements as of her personality, she was always content to be the shadow of her husband's substance. One wonders what this Peter Schlemihl would have done without it. And in other respects she also reminds one of Chamisso. His lyrics which begin with the famous lines

> 'Du Ring an meinem Finger,
> Du trautes Ringelein,'

might have been written for her. By few women has the part of wife and helpmeet been better understood.

She has the instinctive cautiousness of the housewife. This will explain the noticeable reserve with which she at first receives entire strangers. She knows her husband's weaknesses, and how shamelessly these are worked upon by the unscrupulous. In the Daudet *ménage* it is the wife who has acted as the lord, or loaf-warden, as a check on the loaf-giving propensities of the husband. She has been the ant when he has been the *cicade*. In the early days of her marriage she saw what leeches fastened on the generosity of her husband, and the consequence is that until she knows a new friend of his well, she maintains an observant attitude. This explains a certain noticeable reserve in her towards the people whom she meets without knowing them, for Daudet is, indeed, childish in those matters of money which are the A B C of a woman's philosophy. Thus, he has related that, having received the sum of sixty pounds on account of his rights in the comedy in one act entitled 'L'Œillet Blanc,' from Peragalle, the manager—a sum which he insisted on receiving in gold—he was not satisfied until he had spent the whole of it in a single evening at the Maison d'Or. The gold made a great lump in his pocket, and his only regret on the following day was that there was no lump there any longer.

This indifference towards money, a characteristic also of De Goncourt, whilst the opposite trait distinguished De Maupassant, as it still distinguishes Sardou and Zola, has always been a noticeable feature in Daudet. Thus, on the occasion of his first terrible journey to Paris, if he travelled with only two francs in his pocket out of an initial sum of twenty francs, it was because he had paid the remaining eighteen francs for excess of baggage, this excess being produced by the books which he took with him. Thus, also, when money first came to him by the great success of his novel 'Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné,' he brought home the first receipts in notes and gold and silver, and spreading the coins out on the floor in front of his wife, danced a dance which he afterwards denominated as the 'Pas de Fromont.'

That this indifference towards the material questions of life should be shamelessly worked upon by those who knew of Daudet's weaknesses is not surprising. It is certain that there is no man in Paris more preyed on by borrowers than Alphonse Daudet. His generosity is unbounded, and the reputation of it is world-wide. On one occasion, when the writer was spending the evening with him, in company with Mr. Rowland Strong, the gifted Paris correspondent of the *Morning Post*, there came

amongst the evening's letters a long epistle from Glasgow. As this was written in English, and as Daudet is no linguist, he handed it to Mr. Strong, asking him to tell him its purport. This letter came from a Scotchwoman, who 'had heard of Mr. Daudet's great charity,' and accordingly set forth a most dismal tale. Her husband, numerous children, and herself, she wrote, had for several weeks past been living on dry bread and the cheapest kind of tea, and what she asked of Daudet, whom she had addressed as '—— Daudet, Esquire, Fourth Floor, Faubourg St. Germain, Paris,' was that he should advance the sum necessary to take her, her husband, and the numerous children to Palermo, in Sicily, where they were assured of remunerative employment.

It cannot be here recorded what was the answer vouchsafed to this extraordinary application. It is only one example of the numerous letters which Alphonse Daudet receives every day applying for relief from persons who are totally unknown to him. The English and American begging-letter writers seem to include other notable Frenchmen on their lists, and François Coppée has told the writer that out of the twenty letters which he receives daily, at least four, on an average, are applications for money from Anglo-Saxon foreigners of whose names he

has never heard. With no less vigour is Alphonse Daudet assailed by the needy in Paris. It may be added that few really in distress appeal to him in vain. On one occasion within the writer's knowledge a man, describing himself as a man of letters, called on Alphonse Daudet, and after vague conversation about literature, as he stood pulling at a straggling beard, told Daudet, who had challenged him to state the real reason of his visit, that he was three terms behind with his rent, and that unless he paid his landlord he would be turned into the street, together with his wife and one forgets how many children. 'I asked him what the sum was,' said Daudet, in relating this incident; 'and when he had mentioned it, I said that Ebner and I would see what could be done.' On another occasion the writer had an appointment to see him at his house, and on arriving there heard that there was a gentleman with M. Daudet. On entering the familiar study, after the gentleman's departure, the writer found Daudet in a state of great nervous exhaustion, and on the table before him lay a loaded revolver. 'I had to get my revolver out to the fellow,' he cried. 'I never saw such a scoundrel. He told me that he was a writer on the *Triboulet*, and he said that unless I gave him two thousand francs he should be obliged to commit suicide. He

afterwards reduced his demand, and implored me to lend him twenty francs, promising to return them on the fifteenth of this month. He managed to soften me, and I lent him the money; and I said as I gave it to him, "On the fifteenth of this month I shall know whether you are a man of honour or *une canaille*." He then became so rude that I really had to take my revolver out of the drawer. And to think that you were in the ante-chamber all the time.' The money, it need hardly be mentioned, was never returned. Daudet must be the most liberal lender in Paris. He says that he knows the borrower's shake of the hands—the shake that gropes for bullion in the palm. 'When there is only five francs, the fingers seem to say to me, "Hullo, there's not much fat to-day." On the other hand, when I have slipped a louis d'or into my palm, the fingers are jubilant.' Not unfrequently on the days of reception at Champrosay there joins himself to the invited guests some shabby individual, who appears known to nobody, but makes his way with the rest to the Daudets' house. His greeting of the 'dear master' is effusive, and the time always comes when he is seen drawing Alphonse Daudet aside, under the half amused, half anxious glance of Madame Daudet, for a long and whispered confabulation. The result of this

conversation is that whilst the mysterious stranger jubilantly withdraws, Daudet, harrowed, in spite of an incredulity which is more than justified, by some altogether lamentable tale, is nervous and distressed for a long time after. By reason of this nervousness, and of the fact that he finds it difficult to refuse a request, Daudet has never been a good business man. 'Sometimes this nervousness of mine,' he told the writer, 'plays me bad tricks. I remember that it cost me a large sum of money one morning not very long ago. A kind of dramatic agent, accompanied by his wife, came to see me, to ask me to sell the rights of translation of my play 'La Lutte pour la Vie,' and they bothered and irritated me so, that in order to get rid of them I sold them this right for four thousand francs. The woman told me how handsome I was, and said that women must have been very fond of me when I was a young man. She had a hat with huge feathers in it, and was altogether a most extraordinary person. I afterwards heard that immediately on leaving me this very business-like couple had rushed off to dispose of the English rights in my play to a London manager, who had come to Paris for the purpose of securing them, and within an hour had sold these rights for thirty thousand francs, reserving the American rights to

themselves. So that my nervousness that morning cost me about one thousand pounds. It is true that as a rule I manage my affairs better than that.'

Madame Daudet, with greater prudence, is not so easily moved by harrowing tales of distress. Her experience of the shiftless, borrowing Bohemian has assisted her to form a true estimate of the compassion of which he is deserving. She, very rightly, does not approve of the abuse of her husband's good-nature; and this is one of the few points on which the husband and wife do not agree. De Goncourt relates that he was present on one occasion when Daudet laughingly taxed his wife with having little pity for the unfortunate—an accusation which Madame Daudet denied, saying that formerly that was so, when she was a happy girl and bride, and was altogether taken up with her own happiness; but that with time a feeling for the misfortunes of others entered her character. She might have added that most of the Bohemian gentlemen who worry her husband for loans, to be spent in riotous living in the Latin Quarter, are totally undeserving of pity of any sort. Like most women, she has a better sense of the value of money than her husband. Although, unlike the Zola *ménage*, the Daudets, after their marriage, were never in actual distress, there were times in the beginning of

their married life when money was scarce, and the shadow of want cast itself over the happy home. In those days Alphonse Daudet used to frequent the pawnshop, though his wife never knew it. Indeed, for a long time after she was married Madame Daudet did not even know of the existence of the Mont-de-Piété. When she knew of it, she would never mention its name. 'Have you been *there?*' she would ask of her husband. In referring to this, De Goncourt remarks, 'And what is pretty about this is, that this young woman, brought up in a *bourgeois* way, was never in the least bewildered by the strange life into which she stepped on her marriage, in the society of this world of self-invited guests, who ate her dinners and worried her husband for loans of twenty-franc pieces and pairs of trousers.'

During the first years of their married life, Daudet's ambition seems to have lain fallow. At that time, he says, all that he asked of life was to be allowed to live 'actively, violently, noisily'; to be allowed to sing, to make music, to roam about the woods with the fumes of wine in his head, and to have Marlowe-like struggles in the beer-houses. He adds that it was the war that transformed him, that made him think that he must die one day, and that if he continued to live as he was living then, he would leave

nothing behind him. It was then that he set to work. At other times he has said that it was his wife who so influenced him; and this is certainly the fact, although, no doubt, the serious considerations evoked by the war may have contributed towards the good result. He has related how his wife 'buckled him down.' His critics attribute his transformation into a 'great producer' to the influence of his wife. Jules Lemaître, for instance, writes: 'Without her, it may be, the Petit Chose would have continued all his life to write here and there, as the fancy took him, his short and exquisite *fantaisies*. It is she who will force him to work, without making her influence felt, and will make him write fine books.'

The above passage occurs in M. Lemaître's study on Madame Alphonse Daudet in his 'Les Contemporains, Études et Portraits Littéraires,' and, indeed, Madame Daudet deserves to find a place in any and every book in which the more prominent literary persons of contemporary France are considered; and this not alone on account of her admitted collaboration with her husband, but because what little she has produced and published as her own work is marked by qualities of style which entitle it to admiration and its author to respect. Her volume, 'Impressions de Nature et d'Art,'

which has reached a second edition, is composed of a series of papers entitled 'L'Enfance d'une Parisienne,' followed by several prose and poetical fancies and *pensées*, described as 'Notes et Impressions,' and is completed by a number of critical essays and studies. These last were originally published in *Le Journal Officiel*, under the editorship of Ernest Daudet, which at that time was not, as to-day, a mere budget of official news, but contained, besides Government intelligence, articles both of literary and of dramatic criticism. Madame Daudet commenced contributing to *Le Journal Officiel* very shortly after her marriage, writing under the name of 'Karl Stern.' 'This was great fun,' she said, in speaking of the matter with the writer, 'because the authors whose books I used to review, and the people who read the *Officiel*, all took me for a man, and I used to receive quantities of letters every week beginning "Sir," some of them hardly worded with the politeness with which one addresses a woman.'

Madame Daudet's method of criticism, as exemplified in the republished 'Études Littéraires,' is painstaking and indulgent to a degree, which surprises one when one remembers that of all critics the most severe are women themselves engaged in literary production. It is a kind of criticism which,

unfortunately for literature in France, no longer exists. Indeed, literary criticism of any kind may be described as a lost art in France, and Sainte Beuve, one fears, would find his occupation gone could he return to earth in these days when the commercialism both of men of letters and of the newspaper proprietors and editors has discarded the careful study of contemporary literature as matter of an encumbering and profitless nature.

'L'Enfance d'une Parisienne,' which contains Madame Daudet's reminiscences of her childhood, is not a mere relation of facts, but the rendering, in a style of peculiar picturesqueness and charm, of the various sensations of her youth. Amongst the sketches in which her light and supple pen, as Lemaître calls it, may be admired at its best may be mentioned, 'Le Bal,' 'Les Greniers,' and 'Ce qu'on voit à travers un voile de mousseline blanche,' the sensations of a girl on the day of her confirmation, which last is the best known of her writings. A touch of melancholy pervades all these reminiscences of childhood, communicated, it may be, by the old seventeenth-century house in which the writer used to spend many months of the year when a child. One remembers what Flaubert wrote about the melancholy that is inspired by old houses.

In her book, 'Notes d'une Parisienne,' Madame Daudet has formulated her literary creed. She is not impressed by facts themselves, but only by the atmosphere which they create around themselves. Things and persons only exist for her in a literary sense by that imperceptible *frisson* which they leave behind them, a *frisson* which is felt only by those very delicately sensitive, to adequately describe which on paper requires a miracle of style. She sums up her idea of art in the phrase: 'En art pour être exact, il faut que cela tremble aux yeux.' Style, in her opinion, is the principal element of a book, its sole *raison d'être*, its sole excuse. The subject of a book may be such as most people, especially women, would find revolting; Madame Daudet considers the style in which it is written alone, and if it is well written it will enjoy her approval. Thus, she applauded M. de Goncourt's 'Germinie Lacerteux,' and is a great admirer of Zola's 'L'Assommoir,' because, although she dislikes the subject of both, she considers them both admirably well written. In literature, it is to the form and not to the *fond* that she looks. This was duly set forth in the literary studies in her book; her opinion has not altered since. In the part of 'Impressions de Nature et d'Art' which bears the sub-title 'Notes et Impressions' may be found certain poems and

*pensées*, besides word-pictures, which may be said to be the work of a very artist in letters.

There is lofty thought set forth in noble language, for instance, in the 'Ode to Melancholy':

'Comme une songeuse Ophélie,
Près de l'âme, fleuve irisé,
Se penche la Melancholie.

'Sous ses doigts blancs elle a brisé
Tous les rameaux dont l'Espérance
Ombrait le rivage apaisé.'

Amongst Madame Daudet's *pensées*, the following one denotes a keen if pessimistic observation:

'It is a sign of a want of feeling to like novels and plays which cause the reader or spectator to weep, a confession that one's own well-spring has dried up, and that it must be fed afresh.'

A little gem, too, is the following, which must be left in the original French:

'Les fenêtres fermées ressemblent à des yeux d'aveugle. Les vitres luisent, le bleu du ciel s'y pose en surface et elles regardent sans voir; elles se contentent du reflet, puisqu'il leur manque la vision.'

After the transformation of *Le Journal Officiel* into a mere daily budget of official news, Madame Daudet contributed regularly to *La Vie Moderne*, but anonymously. Her first signed contribution in any paper was a poem, which was printed in a

journal called *La Renaissance*. Amongst the contributions to *La Vie Moderne* may be mentioned the pictures of child-life — 'Bébé Dessine,' 'La Lecture,' 'Les Emplettes.' Of late years Madame Daudet has not unfrequently contributed to *Le Figaro*. In the meanwhile, she published a volume of fragments entitled, 'Fragments d'un Livre Inédit,' of which M. Lemaître writes: 'In this book Madame Alphonse Daudet no longer expresses her distant souvenirs, but describes her recent impressions, day by day. The sky of Paris, the streets of Paris, the women of Paris, the flowers, music, journeys, society, drawing-rooms, toilette, home-life, and child-life, her pen steps merrily through them all, more nervously, more keenly, and with greater subtlety and hardiness than in her former volume. Here she decidedly "De Goncourtizes" herself, with a slight touch of fever, a not altogether healthy wish to "express the impalpable," to "say what has not been said." And at times, indeed, the impression is held fast until it escapes and flees athwart the words, like smoke which escapes between fingers which. subtle and agile as they may be, cannot hold it back. But the effort is in itself charming. "Originality in art pleases me, even when it is a mistaken originality," says Madame Daudet, and may be said by us with her.'

And lower down he sums up his opinion on this book in the words: 'Morbid art and a healthy mind, a somewhat ill-poised style and a well-balanced brain, such is the double attraction of this diary, which sets one dreaming of an altogether modern impressionist Penelope.'

It is rumoured in the Republic of Letters that Madame Daudet has largely collaborated with her husband, and that the production of many of his masterpieces is of as much credit to her as to him. The exact nature of this collaboration, by reason of Madame Daudet's great modesty, has never been defined. Yet that Daudet acknowledges his indebtedness to his wife has been shown on several occasions. To the writer he has declared in conversation: 'I must say that in my literary work I owe nearly all to my wife. She re-reads all my books, and advises me on every point. She is all that is most charming, and has a wonderful mind, entirely opposed to mine, a synthetic spirit.' When he was struck down by illness whilst engaged on 'Numa Roumestan,' and expected to die, he called his wife to his bedside and said, 'Finis mon bouquin,' as a dying wish. To the 'Nabab' he prefixed a preface, worded as follows: 'To my discreet and indefatigable collaborator, to my very dear Julia Daudet, I offer, with great gratitude and

thankful tenderness, this book, which owes so much to her.' Madame Daudet refused to allow this preface to be printed, and insisted on its suppression when the presses were already at work. Only a few copies of the first edition bear this testimony to Madame Daudet's collaboration and literary worth. The other copies of the hundred and ten thousand since issued may be said to bear testimony to her rare modesty.

Two interesting letters, one from Madame Daudet and the other from her husband, which bear upon this intimate collaboration, are in the possession of the writer, and may be produced here in part.

'I write,' says Madame Daudet, 'in a state akin to that of somnambulism, and my work often astonishes me when I read it over again as though it were not from my pen. I am subject to impressions which are, as it were, reflected impressions, and emotions which I may describe as the emotions of a dream. No more. I only know, and I only see, that which is within me, and as to the manner in which others penetrate me, as it were in lightning flashes, I am not sure of being able to render it. The things which strike me are the atmosphere which surrounds persons and things, the indiscernible and the indescribable, and style leads me away from matters of human interest.

Believe me that my little definition of my collaboration with my husband by comparing it with a fan is the true one, no more, no less. It is natural enough that marriage and regularity of life should have steadied my husband in his work, maturity of age coming upon him simultaneously with maturity of talent. My good influence upon him in this respect may be attributed rather to my *bourgeois* qualities, my good motherly care, than to my qualities as a writer, which are indeed most fitful.'

It is in the following words that in his letter Alphonse Daudet describes his wife's character and her influence on him as a writer :

'That she is a Parisienne, goes without saying. Fond of gray skies, wet streets, society, show-windows, flowers, the theatre, a pretty home, always full of light and always adorned.

'As a mother, she excels all that I have ever come across. Till the age of eleven Léon had no other tutor, and from the very beginning he showed himself the pupil that you know of. She began it all over again with Lucien, and whilst giving her lessons watched and listened as the good seed fell and germinated in the little head. And in the same way when at her milliner's or at her dressmaker's, whilst awaiting her turn to be served, the inquisitive Parisienne keeps her eyes open, and

hence those studies which appeared in *La Vie Moderne* and elsewhere, studies afterwards republished under the title 'Les Enfants et La Femme.'

Her childhood was spent in Paris in the great commercial quarters, the summers being passed in the country at her grandfather's house, at the Château de Vigneux. For twenty consecutive years she went there. It was there that she acquired her taste for nature, for deep shades, for luxurious parks, pheasantries and ornamental waters. In her father's library all the poets might be read, but not Scribe or the *Gymnase*. Her father and mother, poets themselves, had produced, in collaboration, a volume of verse, 'Les Marges de la Vie,' and had signed it with both their names. Theirs were delicate and lofty minds, the refined educators of this elegant nature.

'When we first came to know each other—for after seventeen years of married life an exchange of faculties has taken place—when we first came to know each other, she was living as in a dream, all living things having for her the impalpability and softness of touch of shadows thrown upon a screen. But if she be less observant, less vital than myself, she is also more of an artist.

'I have told you what part she has had in my literary work, her revision of every single page. She herself, in a note which I find in one of her

note-books, will give you the definition of our dual labours :

' " Our collaboration is like a Japanese fan. On one side are the subject, the characters, the atmosphere in which they move. On the other side sprays of verdure, petals of flowers, the slender prolongation of a little branch, what remains of colour or of gold-leaf on the painter's brush.

' " And it is I who do this minuter task, bearing in mind what is beneath, and ever careful that my flights of storks shall be the continuation of the wintry landscape, or that the green shoots on the brown hollows of the bamboos shall complete the spring spread out on the other, and principal, side of the fan." '

De Goncourt gives a very pretty picture of this *travail à deux*, as witnessed by himself, when the Daudets were living in the old house in the Marais, where 'Fromont Jeune and Risler Aîné' was produced. He shows us Daudet sitting at one table in the large room, and Madame Daudet at another table, with little Léon running between the two, carrying the page which his father has just written to his mother, who revises it.

Daudet has sometimes complained of his wife's influence. On one occasion he exclaimed to De Goncourt : 'Look here, it is very unfortunate

. . . as a matter of fact you have disturbed me . . . yes, you and Flaubert and my wife. . . . I have no style, no, I have no style, and that is a fact. People born on the other side of the Loire do not know how to write French prose. . . . What I was, was an improvisatore, a man of imagination. . . . You can have no idea what I have in my head. . . . Well, but for you, I should never have bothered myself about this brute of a language . . . and I should have brought forth, and brought forth in peace and quiet.'

Here we have the cry of the *cicade* constrained to husbandry—the querulous complaint of 'Le Petit Chose' brought back by the ear from Rhoneside ramblings, and tied down to his desk, a complaint which is in itself the most eloquent testimony to the advantage which this writer has derived from his wife's influence.

On one of the first occasions on which De Goncourt saw the Daudets he noted in his diary: 'It is a *ménage* which resembles the one that I and my brother made together. The wife writes, and I have reason to suspect that she is an artist in the matter of style.' Some days later, having met Madame Daudet again, he writes of her: 'She is really a very extraordinary woman, Madame Daudet. I have never yet met a living being,

man or woman, who has read so well as she has, or a reader who so thoroughly possesses the methods of optics, of colouring, the syntax, the tricks and the turns of all the militant writers of the present day.'

The wide difference in the character of husband and wife sometimes reveals itself in their discussions about literature. Daudet, for instance, is a great admirer of Montaigne. At one time a volume of the 'Essais' was his inseparable companion. There is amongst the books in his library a copy stained with water, which he used to take with him into his bath at Allevard. His wife finds Montaigne 'abominable, with the commonplace selfishness of his doctrines, his ugly pessimism, and his particularly abominable estimates of woman.' This is the revolt of the monogamous woman-respecting North against the polygamous woman-despising South. In all other respects, however, the Daudets are in perfect harmony, and Emile Zola is indeed right where he speaks of the great good fortune which came to Alphonse Daudet on his marriage.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE FIRST YEAR OF MARRIED LIFE.

As Daudet himself has related, marriage did not bring with it at once the regularity of life and conduct which is indispensable for the production of work of serious importance. The 'Petit Chose,' as Lemaître puts it, continued to scribble his brief and exquisite fancies on the corners of tables. This first year of married life, however, saw him at work in finishing his first novel, 'Le Petit Chose,' rewritten from the draft during six delicious months of honeymoon. It may be remarked that at this time of his life Daudet delighted in writing out-of-doors, a fancy which charms most young men of letters till they find that the inconveniences of the practice far outweigh the imaginary benefits of the fancied inspiration. 'I wrote "Le Petit Chose,"' he writes, 'now on some mossy bench at the end of the park . . . now in a boat on the lake.' But his most curious confession is that when it was raining he used to

write indoors, whilst Madame Daudet played Chopin to him.

Towards the end of this year, 1867, a third piece by Alphonse Daudet was produced in Paris, 'Le Frère Aîné,' a drama in one act, written in collaboration with M. Ernest Lépine. The first performance took place on December 19th, at the Vaudeville Theatre. It is the least commendable, as an acting play, of any of the plays that Daudet has brought before the public. The story is of two brothers. The younger brother had married a woman who was loved by his elder brother. To escape his moral torture, the latter leaves the house and travels abroad for years. The curtain rises on his return. In the meanwhile his brother's first wife has died, and the house has a new mistress. The one act is devoted to the exposition of the elder brother's undying love for the departed woman, his displeasure with his brother for taking a second wife, and his dislike of the woman who has taken his beloved one's place. In the *dénouement*, the married brother and his wife agree to quit the house, leaving him as sole master, so that he may give himself up undisturbed to his memories of the dead. There was not here the material for an acting play, though the idea would have been a good one for an analytical novel after the fashion of

Bourget. 'Le Frère Aîné' was not well received, and was withdrawn after a very short time.

It was not until several months later that Daudet, not discouraged by the comparative want of success of 'Le Petit Chose,' set to work on a new novel. This novel was the now famous 'Tartarin de Tarascon.' Before entering upon the history of this book, it may be of interest to note for what reason it was courageous on the part of Daudet, in view of the sale of 'Le Petit Chose,' once more to attempt a long work. It is a mere question of remuneration, and it must be remembered that Daudet now had the burdens of a married man, and that, on the other hand, he had no income but such as was produced by his pen. Now, at the time that he began to write 'Tartarin de Tarascon,' the entire amount derived from his first long novel, apart from the inconsiderable sum paid him by Dalloz for its use as a serial, did not exceed, at the rate of a royalty of threepence a copy, a total sum of sixty pounds. The temptation to him, therefore, to employ himself in the more profitable field of journalism must have been great, especially when we consider the charges upon him. His courage, however, did not fail him. His purpose was firmly maintained.

The materials for 'Tartarin de Tarascon' were derived from the note-books which Daudet had

filled during his journey in Africa in the winter of 1861. His knowledge of Meridional insincerity, untruthfulness, and braggadocio, especially fitted him for the task of caricaturing the Southern Frenchman; and Tartarin may be looked upon as a caricature of the Frenchman born on the far side of the Loire. It is a subtle, not a broad, study—so elaborately worked out that it is often difficult to decide where the portrait ends and the caricature begins. But caricature it remains, and it is well that Daudet in this book threw off the excess of his ridicule for the Meridional, or Numa Roumestan might never have been the admirable portrait, true to life as a photograph, that it is. For Pegasus as for the race-horse, the preliminary canter has its advantages.

The original title of this work was 'Barbarin de Tarascon,' but it happened that a family of that name actually resided in Tarascon, and the French law permits a man to forbid the use of his name by a novelist. In consequence, the name was changed to Tartarin. This story appeared in the first place in Dalloz's paper, *Le Petit Moniteur Universel*, with sketches by Emile Benassit, and elicited great dissatisfaction on the part of the readers of that journal. Daudet and the editor were assailed with insulting letters, and several subscribers threatened to withdraw their patronage unless the story were dis-

continued. Daudet could console himself with the reflection that such of Balzac's masterpieces as were originally published as serials in the Paris papers had met with a similar reception from the newspaper readers of his day. At the same time, he took pity on Dalloz, who was threatened with ruin by offending his patrons, and, accordingly, after ten instalments of 'Tartarin' had been printed in *Le Petit Moniteur Universel*, he withdrew it from that paper and offered it to the *Figaro*, where it was readily accepted. The readers of the *Figaro*, being of a more enlightened class, were better disposed towards innovations in the matter of literature. At the same time it shows that Daudet's standing must at that time already have been a high one for Villemessant to accept the publication of a serial which had menaced a rival publication with ruin. The story was appreciated by the readers of the *Figaro*, although the assistant editor, Alexander Duvernois, who was vexed at the way in which the author wrote about Algeria, did his best to spoil its success by interrupting the publication on any and every pretext, so that the story dragged its slow length along, and De Villemessant on more than one occasion was heard to mutter and to grumble. Published in volume form by Dentu, 'Tartarin de Tarascon' did not at first meet with any but ordinary success.

To-day, that is to say twenty-seven years after its first appearance, there have been sold of this book 140,000 copies, and the demand continues at the rate of from 2,000 to 5,000 copies per annum. Of its sequel, 'Tartarin sur Les Alpes,' 190,000 copies have been sold, and the book is still selling briskly. 'Port-Tarascon,' the least well known of the series, is in its seventieth edition. From first to last, that is to say, from his departure on the shooting expedition to Africa down to his pathetic death, as described in the last of the series—Barbarin, *alias* Tartarin, has brought his author not less than £15,000, bequeathing him a revenue worth many farms in Beauce.

The preface to the present editions of this book is an interesting one. 'Judged freely, after many years,' writes Daudet about this book, 'Tartarin, with his mad, unbridled manners, seems to me to have qualities of youth, of vitality, of truth—a truth peculiar to the far side of the Loire, which swells out facts, exaggerates them, but never lies. The fibre of the style is neither very fine nor very compact. It is what I call "stand-up literature," spoken, gesticulated, with the exuberant gestures of my hero. But I must confess that however great my love of style may be, or my admiration for harmonious and coloured prose, my opinion is that

the whole question from the novelist's point of view is not centred there.'

This statement may be compared with the opinion expressed by Madame Daudet, that style is the only thing in a book which she considers. It illustrates the difference in the literary creeds of husband and wife.

'The novelist's real delight,' continues Alphonse Daudet, 'rests in the creation of beings. . . . For my part my emotion is always the same when in connection with some passer-by in life, some one of the thousand puppets of political, artistic, or social life, I hear people say: "He is a Tartarin—a Monpavon—a Delobelle." A thrill runs through me at such times, the thrill of pride which a father feels who is hidden in the crowd whilst his son is being applauded, and all the time longs to shout out, "He's my boy!"'

Although a work written in youth before the maturity of his talent, these 'Prodigious Adventures of Tartarin de Tarascon' must be taken into careful consideration in a critical study of Alphonse Daudet's works. One is, therefore, surprised to find Lemaître dismissing them in a few words, which also deal with several of Daudet's short stories. It is true that these words are words of high praise. 'What a treasure of mirth! What charming gaiety, and what

vivacious raillery! Little wit in the way of *mots*, but marked comicality of verve, of imagination, of hyperbole, and, oftener still, a comicality of situations and characters.'

Emile Zola, on the other hand, considered this book as of sufficient importance to devote to it six pages—that is to say, a whole day's work—of the long study on Alphonse Daudet which appears in his collection of essays, 'Les Romanciers Naturalistes.' 'This work,' he writes, 'lives by its sustained merriment, a merriment at times refined, anon bursting out into excesses of buffoonery. Never have the ingenuous liars of Provence been depicted with more lively gaiety. And the irony remains a poet's irony, winged and soaring like the last line of a stanza. Even in the passages where the author loses all measure, and seems on the point of falling into exaggeration, he is saved by the sure insight of an artist's eye. His book never tells anything but the truth, seen from its humorous side, and carried to lyricism. I have always remarked the good humour of his jests; there is no bitterness at the bottom of them, and nothing which is too roughly satirical. M. Alphonse Daudet, as I have said, is no rebel, and he loves mankind.' Elsewhere Zola remarks that this book is one of special interest as exemplifying in a characteristic manner one side of Daudet's talent.

The story of Tartarin will be found humorous even by those who, not knowing the Provençal, with all his foibles and all his virtues, are unable to appreciate the delicate and truthful portraiture which has here been executed. Tartarin is the King of the Nimrods of a small Provençal town. Possessed of a very arsenal of lethal weapons, he has never, for want of game, been able to distinguish himself in proportion to his immense ambition. A menagerie enters the town, and Tartarin spends long hours in gazing at an African lion in the collection. This would indeed be a quarry worthy of his guns. His neighbours jump to the conclusion that his mind is made up to start for Africa, and to rival Gérard, the Lion King. Tartarin had no such intention, but is eventually forced away by the stress of public opinion. He sails for Algeria with a collection of guns, hunting-knives, and Nimrod appliances. At Algiers he falls in with a couple of swindlers, who work upon his artlessness. He shoots no lions, and, indeed, seeks to shoot none, until one day it is impressed upon him that the eye of Tarascon is upon him, and that he must establish his reputation.

In spite of the assurance of all those whom he consults, that there are no lions left in Algeria, and

that Gérard has killed them all, he goes out, and is, indeed, successful in killing one. It happens to be a blind lion, which was being led by a string by two negroes on their way to some religious ceremony. Some time previously he had shot a donkey, which he had mistaken for a lion, and had been obliged to satisfy its owner with the sum of 200 francs. The blind lion costs him still more. He is sued by its owners, and has to pay £100 damages. The skin, however, is a good trophy, and he sends it home to Tarascon. In the meanwhile he is robbed of his money by the swindlers, and has to beg for a free passage home to France. As the steamer is leaving the harbour a camel, which he had purchased for his expeditions in the desert, having conceived a violent affection for him, jumps into the water and swims after the ship. It is taken on board, and lends peculiar lustre to his triumphant entry into Tarascon, where he finds his fellow-citizens in a state of wild enthusiasm about his prowess. The camel 'who saw him kill all his lions, good beast,' silences even the few incredulous.

The English reader of these 'Prodigious Adventures' would prefer less restraint in the fun. It is just this restraint which commends the book to its French readers. Indeed, in spite of the moderation

observed throughout by the author, there are many of Daudet's critics who have regretted that he should have lent his pen to caricature. But if by contrast with his other creations 'Tartarin' may be considered as a caricature, it was, as has been remarked above, a good thing that in this book the author's Provençal *penchant* for exaggeration should have found a full and free vent. Having satisfied this inclination to the full, it did not hamper him in his later creations.

It was, however, with the *conte*, or short story, that Alphonse Daudet principally occupied himself during the first years which followed his marriage, and, indeed, 'Tartarin de Tarascon' is by most of his critics, as by Zola, classified amongst these, so that passing over 'Le Petit Chose,' his first novel is considered to be 'Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné.' It was, indeed, with this longer work that Daudet first conquered the great public, but even though he had never written either this or any one of the long series of novels which followed upon it, yet his literary productions up to the year 1873, when this first novel was written, would by themselves suffice to rank him, as regards both style and the qualities of imagination, sympathy and humour, with the first French writers of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Before proceeding, however, to the exami-

nation of this work, there must be recorded another important event in Daudet's life, which took place in the year 1867.

This was the birth, on November 16, of his son Léon, who to-day, at the age of twenty-seven, shares with Maurice Barrès the foremost place amongst the younger French novelists, and with his last novel, 'Les Morticoles,' has achieved a success established not only by the cordial appreciation of the authorized critics, but also by the continued sale of numerous editions. A spirit of revolt and bitterness is breathed from the works of this young man, who in this respect also differs entirely from his father.

Léon Daudet will be found a most interesting study by those who believe in the theory of heredity, being as he is the son of such a father and of such a mother; and they will point now to some qualities as coming to him from his Northern mother, with her cool common-sense, logic, and love of style, and now to other qualities as inherited from his Southern father, with his vivid imagination and minute powers of observation. That such investigations will not meet with the approval of their subject on the ground of their possessing any scientific value, is proved by the remark which the author of 'Les Morticoles' puts into the mouth of one of the heroes of that book. 'Doubtless,' he

writes, 'I partake of the nature of my parents, but more than both—I am *myself*. . . . I could not be reconstituted by pounding them up together in a mortar. Thanks to my impressionability, my senses are every second adding little lumps of clay to my very personal statue.'

In the same way Monsieur G. Larroumet, late Director of Fine Arts in France, writes of Léon Daudet: 'From such a father and such a mother, a son of literary inclinations must have received, if one believes the theory of heredity, a nature in which the antithesis should produce, as in the union from which he issued, an equilibrium of logic and sentiment. But of all the pretentious and murky theories which we owe to contemporaneous science, I do not know of one more contestable. It has by no means been proved that a man must necessarily resemble his father or mother, or even any one of his direct or indirect ascendants. If a son often reproduces atavistic characteristics, he often, also, renders them unrecognisable. There are examples of men of genius who have sprung from a race of mediocre intelligence, and there are examples of people of high intelligence who have engendered descendants very unworthy of themselves. In this respect, as in many others, Nature acts as she pleases; she does not consult us, she does not take

us into her confidence, and if she be conscious of her work, with what pity must the assurance of our affirmations inspire her! This question of heredity has been attacked by M. Léon Daudet himself, and he will tell us what he thinks of it. For my part, in comparing what he has already written with the work of his father or the books of his mother, I find that he resembles them but little, and, however great may be my sympathy and my admiration for these two writers, I cannot but congratulate him on this circumstance. It needed great courage for M. Léon Daudet to enter upon the career of letters. As a rule, the heirs to a great name, if they in their turn take to literature, cut but a sorry figure in literary history. M. Alexandre Dumas is a glorious exception to a too general rule, and has only realized it by differing altogether from his father. M. Léon Daudet affords an exception of the same kind. He is himself, he has his own originality, and, as far as he is concerned, is the negation of the law of literary heredity.'

If Léon Daudet's literary work differs so completely from that of his father, so has his life differed absolutely from his father's. 'I was always brought up,' he told the writer, 'in the most extraordinary cotton-wool'—a Parisian colloquialism for luxury—'and, in consequence, like happy nations, I have no

history.' He was educated at the Charlemagne and Louis-le-Grand Lycées, and, like his father, was of a temperament strong enough to resist the individuality-crushing system of a French University education. 'Among my professors,' he continued, 'I found some excellent, others who were hideous scoundrels. I had my petty woes, my little worries, my little punishments ; but at that period in my life I was disposed to obey rather than to revolt, and did not feel injustice either towards myself or towards others at all keenly. To-day,' he added significantly, 'matters have altogether changed.'

On leaving school, Léon Daudet commenced to study medicine. 'I had the taste for science, that taste with which the whole age is radiating, and, an Atheist by juvenile principle, I sincerely believed that man could raise himself to the Divinity by species of formulæ. But at the same time I had a taste for speculation in its lyrical form, and studied philosophy with Burdeau ; and I used to amuse myself in constructing thoughts in the style of Kant, of Spinoza, and of Fichte—all this with a great respect for the biological accumulations of Darwin and Spencer.'

The study of medicine, according to himself, showed him the sufferings of the flesh, and convinced him that all was for the worst in the most

hideous society possible. 'At the same time,' he continued, 'I went into the world and found that the majority of clothed beings were as hideous as the naked corpses, and that their selfishness was in proportion to the quantity and quality of their clothing. I saw hypocrisy and intrigue everywhere. This falling-off of the masks coincided with certain personal vexations to which I was exposed. I was refused admission to the *internat*.'

Just at this time Léon Daudet married Jeanne Hugo, February 12, 1891, and, as he says, 'was boiling over with unoccupied imagination.' His experiences and his conclusions turned him away from the study of science, for which he was now 'filled with disgust.' He turned to literature, and wrote and published in succession the novels 'Germe et Poussière,' 'Hoerés,' 'L'Astre Noir,' and 'Les Morticoles,' besides numerous contributions of an advanced political nature to the anti-Governmental *Figaro*, the Socialistic *Germinal*, the *Nouvelle Revue*, and the *Indépendance Belge*.

'To-day,' he added, 'however pretentious such an assertion may appear, I think that I have made a clean sweep of most of the prejudices of my age.' He has faith in no form of Government, in no code of laws, and approves of no restraint of the individual from without. He is, in brief, an Anarchist in the

proper and dignified sense of the word. At the same time he believes that religious faith is the only deep and immovable motive which prevents men from acting like wolves or tigers. He does not hold any such faith himself, but he suffers from the want of it, and he execrates scepticism of every kind. He hates the memory of Renan. He looks on the sciences as immense impostures. 'They give neither truth (which can only be subjective) nor happiness; for they crush down the living, and legalize death.' On the other hand, he has a great faith in the destiny of literature, but holds that 'it is sublime only in proportion to the remedy which it brings for the numerous wrongs which social life brings with it. Art for art, the literary ring, the *cœnaculum*, are as stupid and as malodorous as the academies, which are the schools of coteries.' His literary gods are, in their different manners—Rousseau, Goethe, Lamennais, Swift, Rabelais, Pascal, Shakespeare, Balzac, Walt Whitman, and Aristophanes. Like his father, Léon Daudet has a deep sympathy for the weak and the oppressed, and is sure of always being kept strong for the fight 'by the atrocious injustices which each day brings forth.'

'In this practice,' he concluded, 'I have lost my peace of mind, and I cannot hope ever to recover it.

The slogan of our modern existence is—*débattons nous.*'.

This is the account, entirely from his own mouth, of the opinions held by Léon Daudet, and it denotes the standpoint from which he writes. Of his work up to and including 'Les Morticoles,' which was published in the spring of this year, 1894, it may be said that he has kept the principles enunciated above steadfastly before his eyes. The purpose of his stories, which are pre-eminently stories with a purpose, appears to be to establish the truth of that dictum of François Rabelais which is prefixed to 'Les Morticoles':

'Science sans conscience est la ruine de l'âme.'

In the construction of his stories he is evidently influenced by Swift and Rabelais. He takes his readers to fantastic countries, as Swift takes Gulliver and Rabelais takes Pantagruel. The scene of his novel 'L'Astre Noir' is an imaginary confederate principality between France and Germany, a buffer-state called Senestre. In 'Les Morticoles' his heroes, lost on the high seas, happen upon a country of which geography does not make mention, 'the land of the Morticoles,' by which is figured the hospital world of Paris. In 'L'Astre Noir' Daudet has described, in the person of one Malauve, how

a great mind and an incomparable intellect, unrestrained by faith, may miserably go astray. In 'Les Morticoles' he expounds all the horrors of which men of science, unrestrained by faith and the human charity which proceeds from the belief that men are the creatures of a living God, may be capable. The picture is certainly overdrawn, but not so pronouncedly so as to lose its value as a warning cry. The last lines of the book may be quoted, as the conclusion arrived at from this pitiless exposure, contained in three hundred and fifty-eight pages of close type. It is Félix Canelon, the hero, who speaks: 'I then placed myself between my two companions, with one hand resting on the shoulder of each, and turning towards the horizon, where Freedom lay, I cried out: "My God, Thou art the source of all goodness, of all love. Without Thee conscience is a mere word, and man but a heap of mud and blood. Let the example of the Morticoles, which we have quoted, save the whole world. These unhappy men believed that matter was all-sufficient; they have driven Thee forth from their minds. Thy vengeance lies in their state of falsehood, of hatred, of wretchedness. Believing themselves free, they are slaves; believing themselves immortal by knowledge, they are the most ignorant and the most ephemeral of men, for they are blind

to the high truth which lies in Thee alone, and proceeds from no other source but Thee. . . . Weighed down with evils, blind and deaf, they will ever grope in a killing obscurity, whilst the simple in heart and mind shall see clearly, shall enjoy pure emotions and an eternal beatitude. Glory to Thee, alone glorious! Woe, thrice woe, upon this unhallowed city where Thy name is forgotten!'

'Les Morticoles,' as has already been mentioned, has achieved decided success in Paris, and it would be quite untrue to state, as has been stated by some of Léon Daudet's critics, that this may be accounted for by the fact that the novel is supposed to be a novel in which well-known living people are attacked. The novelty of the theme, the minute care with which every detail has been worked out, the author's pleasant and vivacious style, all contribute to render the book a popular one. It may be noticed as a sign of its success that the word 'Morticole,' as designating a doctor, has already been adopted by the Paris public, just as the word 'Delobelle' has been borrowed from M. Léon Daudet's father to designate a pretentious and incapable mummer.

M. Léon Daudet is at present at work on a novel to be called 'L'Automate,' a title which shows that the series of philippics upon which he has engaged

has not been exhausted. It will be followed by a book entitled 'Le Fleuve Humain.' This young writer is a man of great industry, and, thanks to circumstances, is able to give himself up entirely and without disturbances to his art. His study in the Avenue Kléber is the workroom of a savant rather than of a young novelist; but his love for the serious by no means interferes with a natural vivacity and gaiety which may be found in his books also. A glance at his writing-table shows that its owner does not work with a running pen. It is hollowed out in the centre, so that when he is at work at this table there is a flap on either side of him. Each flap is for the books which, as his novel progresses, have to be consulted. This little peculiarity establishes the fact that Léon Daudet relies on the serious study of authentic materials and 'documents.' It is difficult to predict what may be the future of the scientific novel as typified in the work of Léon Daudet. It can only be recorded that, as the evidence stands at present, there exists amongst the Paris public a large number of readers who take considerable interest in this novel experiment in the art of fiction.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ALPHONSE DAUDET'S SHORT STORIES.

One often hears it said in these days, when under the stress of circumstances people embark on literature in the same commercial spirit as on all other bread-winning professions, that it is disadvantageous for a writer to apply himself to the composition of short stories, because in so doing he sacrifices, for the sake of greatly inferior remuneration, an idea, or occasionally a series of ideas, which might serve him for the more marketable, and certainly more remunerative, novel. Of few writers can it be said with more truth than of Alphonse Daudet, that in his short stories he has lavished ideas which, had his imagination ever failed him when he afterwards came to write books, would have stood him in excellent stead. Of many of Daudet's *contes* and *nouvelles* it may be said, as both Zola and Lemaître have said, that they are complete novels in miniature, with *exposition*, de-

velopment, and *dénouement*, which, if duly elaborated, would have furnished forth volumes well worthy to stand beside 'Sapho,' the 'Nabab,' and all the other novels which Daudet has written.

In a conversation which the writer had with Alphonse Daudet, the latter remarked that it was he who invented the short story. In saying this, M. Daudet meant to imply that it was he who was the first to contribute short stories to the periodical press, for, of course, the short story, call it *conte*, or *nouvelle*, or *fabliau*, is as old as French literature. Nor is it quite certain that Daudet can lay claim to the exclusive credit of an innovation which has certainly done much to raise the standard of French periodical publications, and to invest them with a literary value which raises them above the level, in this respect at least, of the periodical press of other countries. For unless one be mistaken, Emile Zola was at this time also writing short stories, the admirable miniatures which are to-day known as 'Contes à Ninon' and 'Nouvelles Contes à Ninon.'

It is, however, incontestable that of all contemporary writers it was Alphonse Daudet who applied himself with the greatest energy, enthusiasm, and affection to this form of literary composition, and therein achieved a success which only his later triumphs have to some extent obscured.

For, as has already been remarked, the world will not admit universality of talent. A man must be labelled, and must be known by his label. We applaud Guy de Maupassant as a writer of short stories, whereas his best work is to be found in two of his novels; and we hail Alphonse Daudet as a great novelist, when he has at least equal claim to our applause as a writer of short stories, which in point of imagination, invention and style are superior to any which have been written in France during the last half of this century.

Emile Zola is of opinion that the reason why Alphonse Daudet in the early part of his literary career devoted himself almost exclusively to the writing of short stories was that, being in need of immediate remuneration, he could not afford the time for work which by its nature produces only a deferred remuneration. One does not think, from one's knowledge of Daudet's character and of the ideal which all along he had set before him, that any such consideration moved him. It is much more probable that the greater possibilities of artistic treatment offered by the *conte* or *nouvelle*, as compared to the long novel, attracted him, whilst, on the other hand, his capacity for industry and sustained effort was by no means fully developed at this period of his career, and he would thus be attracted

by tasks which could be more rapidly completed. Nobody can say that it was the desire for immediate remuneration which prompted Guy de Maupassant to write short stories in preference to longer works, because Guy de Maupassant enjoyed a handsome private fortune; and why should Alphonse Daudet be accused of writing 'pot-boilers' because at that time his purse was light? One cannot expect in the *cicade* the laborious industry of the ant, and these were the *cicade* years of Alphonse Daudet's career.

His marvellous series of short stories commenced with the 'Lettres de mon Moulin' in 1866, the first of which appeared in De Villemessant's *L'Evènement*. After his marriage Daudet returned to Provence, taking his wife with him; and from the same house at Fontvielle, on the road between Arles and Avignon, collected material for a new series of 'Letters from my Windmill.' The latter were written at Champrosay, in Eugène Delacroix's studio, and were published in the *Figaro* during the years 1867, 1868, and 1869. Many of these little masterpieces cost their author weeks of unremitting labour. Never did author so assiduously perform the functions of whetstone. It is recorded that days were often spent over one page in that terrible hand-to-hand fight with words of which the con-

scientious writer alone knows. These stories strike the keynote of Daudet's talent. The reader finds in them all the qualities which distinguish this writer's work: infinite pity, a comfortable optimism, and a spirit of genuine humour, which at times develops into rollicking fun. But especially are they noticeable for the extreme polish which radiates from every line. The infinite capacity for taking pains, which has been described as synonymous with genius, is here most strikingly exemplified. Zola speaks of these stories as 'little jewels.' Lemaître says that the word 'charming,' cleansed of the ignoble uses to which it has been put, might be used alone to qualify them.

In the 'Lettres de mon Moulin,' then, we find exemplified, apart from the perfection of style which has characterized everything that Daudet has ever written, his supreme qualities of pity, fancy, and humour. For a picture of human pity what better illustration could one need than the little sketch 'Les Deux Auberges'? Here we are shown two inns, one opposite the other, in some Provençal town. The one is full of customers; to the other no one ever comes. For the hostess of the deserted inn, as she tells the author, 'is not pretty, and is always sad.' She suffers from fever, and then she has recently lost her two little children. People always

like to see cheerful faces, and so all the customers prefer to go to the inn on the other side of the way, where the hostess is a buxom Arles woman, 'with lace and a gold chain which goes thrice round her neck.' Even her own husband prefers the other inn. 'Men are like that,' explains the poor woman; 'they don't like to see people cry, and I—I am always crying since my little ones died.' 'Hush!' she adds, as a Provençal song breaks out over the way; 'there he is singing again.' And trembling, with her hands stretched out in front of her, her cheeks bedewed by large tears, which only added to her uncomeliness, she stood there as in an ecstasy before the window, listening to her José as he sang for the woman of Arles:

> '"Le premier lui a dit:
> Bonjour, belle mignonne."'

'Le Portefeuille de Bixiou' is another story in this collection in which Daudet's pity for the weak, the unfortunate, the conquered in life's battle, for whom Zola 'has no pity whatever,' again manifests itself. For Daudet is a lover of mankind, and its misfortunes afflict him where they rejoice others. It is proof of a strong nature that this should be so, for Daudet had many reasons to be bitter. One need but remember his youth. And in this con-

nection he himself has said, no doubt with reference to himself, in 'Jack': 'Childhoods so sorrowful as these produce bitter maturities. The joys of life, prosperities without number, are needed to efface the impression of these first years; and one sees men who are rich, happy, powerful, and in high places, who never seem to enjoy their good fortune, so completely have their mouths retained the bitter curve of their former disappointments, and their manners that shamefaced timidity which is acquired by young bodies in old and shabby clothes, made up out of discarded garments.'

It may be urged, indeed, that Daudet's miseries in youth were not of long duration; that the excellent good fortune which befell him so shortly after his arrival in Paris was more than sufficient to efface any feeling of resentment against life and mankind which he may have acquired in the years of unhappiness; and that consequently his buoyant and unvarying cheerfulness, his radiant optimism, may justly be attributed to exceptional circumstances rather than to a strong nature and a faithful creed. As a set-off, however, we would point out that during the last twelve years of his life Alphonse Daudet has known suffering of the keenest nature, a pain-racked body, unceasing torment, the annihilation of all the hopes that he had formed for his

middle age; that, in spite of his activity, he is constrained to inertia; that, though he is full of mental energy, his body refuses its offices; that the periods in which actual pain quits him for awhile have been compared by him to those intervals of rest which, for crueller torment, were accorded by the Romans to the crucified whom they took down from the cross previous to once more nailing them on the accursed tree; and that, in spite of all this, his sympathy has never wavered, his altruism has never turned to egotism, his merry, optimistic cheerfulness has always remained the same. This is the most lovable feature in a wholly lovable nature, and it is one that may well be insisted upon in these days of bitter complaints, which are for the most part the wailings of irritated selfishness. It is his great strength, and at the same time his weakness; for where he has been prompted, as in the case of 'Jack,' to write a 'cruel, a bitter book,' his pity urges him to untie the knots in the knout with which his indignation has armed him. Thus, of the very men whom he had steeled himself to scourge, we find him writing in 'Jack': 'So much misery was written on their shabby appearance, that, in spite of everything, one felt compassion at the sight of the feverish brilliancy of these eyes intoxicated with illusions, before these ravaged countenances, where

all the vanquished dreams, all the hopes struck dead by failure, had left their traces.' And one might quote many other instances of this untying of the knots in a salutary and desirable knout.

In 'L'Homme à la Cervelle d'Or' Daudet displays a fantastic vein which reminds one of Hoffmann. He tells of a man who is gifted by nature with a brain of pure gold, and goes squandering it the world over, till in the end all the gold is gone, and his feverish, groping fingers can bring forth from his head only tiny fragments of gold stained with blood. One fancies that this conceit may have come to him one evening as he sat in the noisy Brasserie des Martyrs, and watched the men with the brains of gold, and foresaw the day when their prodigality would wreck the store, and blood only would come at their last call—Murger, Baudelaire, and a thousand other prodigal sons of Nature, for whom she has no pardon when once they have squandered their heritage.

In a similar strain, but here blended with humour, is his 'La Pendule de Bougival,' which reminds one of the manner of Wilhelm Hauff. This story is to be found in 'Contes du Lundi.' It relates how a Parisian clock, stolen by Bavarian soldiers, finds its way to Munich, and by its influence debauches a respectable family of German *bourgeois*, transforming

them from staid and learned citizens into flippant, frivolous, and pleasure-loving persons, who finally flee from Munich with the art-treasures confided by the Government to their care. One thinks of Andersen and his 'Goloshes' in reading this story, though the general impression is that Daudet had read Hauff, which was not the case.

For excellent examples of Daudet's humour one need but read 'L'Elixir du Père Gaucher' (already referred to), 'Le Curé de Cucugnan,' and in 'Contes du Lundi' his 'Le Pape est Mort.' This is the true story of an act of youthful untruthfulness, and on this account is excellent testimony to the fact that Daudet's humour is innate and personal. When he was quite a little boy in Lyons, and had one day come home very late from one of his truant excursions, he was in great perplexity how to explain his delay and escape chastisement. So when his father angrily asked him, 'Where have you been?' he answered, by a sudden inspiration, 'Oh, haven't you heard? The Pope is dead.' This grave piece of news caused his parents to forget all about his fault, and the evening was spent in sad stories of the deaths of Popes. The next morning everybody was too glad to hear that the report was unfounded to think of resuming inquiry into the cause of little Alphonse's untoward absence.

But what more than anything else is apparent from Alphonse Daudet's short stories, as contained in his 'Lettres de mon Moulin,' his 'Contes du Lundi,' his 'Lettres à un Absent,' and his 'Femmes d'Artistes,' is the universality of his perception, his wide knowledge of humanity and of human life in all its phases, his comprehension of motives, whether base or noble, and his conviction, with all this knowledge, that, though not everything that is is right, only a little tolerance, a little altruism, are necessary to make a very habitable world of the world we live in. Great as is one's admiration for De Maupassant, we are forced to admit, in reading Daudet's short stories, that he is but Daudet's disciple, and that his originality only lies in the more or less pronounced dose of bitterness which he infused into each one of his tales. 'Le Prussien de Belisaire,' 'Le Petit Stenne,' 'Maison à Louer,' and 'Les Petits Pâtés,' are all stories which De Maupassant would have loved to tell, whilst perverting the motives of their heroes, and insisting on the baseness, egotism, and cupidity of their conduct. As for the story entitled 'Un Teneur de Livres' in 'Contes du Lundi,' it is De Maupassant to the life; and it is a fact on which readers of Daudet may congratulate themselves, that it is, perhaps, the only occasion on which Daudet's tolerance did not untie the knots of the scourge

which his revolt against certain forms of selfishness had put into his hand. We have here the book-keeper at the Paris Morgue, who, on his way to his office, buys apples for roasting on his office-stove, and, whilst registering the suicide of a girl who had killed herself because her illegitimate child was dying of hunger, is greatly occupied as to the state of the roasting apples. In this one little story Daudet let his bitterness—such bitterness as by painful and laborious pressure on his gall he was able to produce—flow out in a tiny stream which almost at once ran dry.

Even the great Zola has in some respects been preceded by Alphonse Daudet in this 'Conte du Lundi.' Take the following passage in his sketch entitled 'Alsace, Alsace': '. . . Debout devant son champ ruiné, un grand paysan long, voûté, vêtû à la mode de la vieille Alsace, regardait cela silencieusement. Il y avait une vraie douleur sur sa figure, mais en même temps quelque chose de résigné et de calme, je ne sais quel espoir vague, comme s'il s'était dit que sous les épis couchés sa terre lui restait toujours vivante, fertile, fidèle, et que tant que la terre est là, il ne faut pas désesperer.' Now compare this with the notable passage in Emile Zola's novel 'La Débâcle,' where, at the end of the battle of Sedan, Maurice sees a peasant whom he

had noticed in the morning: '. . . le paysan qu'il avait vu le matin et qui continuait à labourer sans hâte, poussant sa charrue attelée d'un grand cheval blanc. Pourquoi perdre un jour? Ce n'était pas parce qu'on se battait, que le blé cesserait de croître et le monde de vivre.'

Again, in his story 'Arthur' in 'Contes du Lundi' Daudet shows that he had seen all the horrors that alcohol produces in a workman's family. His deduction from an admirable exposition of the effects of drunkenness is not an 'Assommoir,' but the reflection that it is hardly reasonable for workmen who drink their wages and beat their wives to wish to be masters of society.

The production of these various masterpieces was so unremunerative that a glance at Daudet's income during this period at once disposes of the statement that in writing them he was moved by any thought of lucre. As a matter of fact, when, in 1872, Edmond About, writing for the London *Athenæum* on the incomes of various men of letters in France, came to consult him as to what might be his annual earnings from his pen, Daudet made up his accounts, and found that his average receipts from his pen, including his dramatic pieces, did not exceed £200 a year.

This work, however, brought him recognition of

another kind. In 1870, just before the war, Alphonse Daudet was created a Knight of the Legion of Honour, at an age when this distinction is rarely, if ever, accorded to Frenchmen. It is not recorded how Daudet received his nomination. To-day he expresses some contempt for distinctions of this kind, as given by politicians to artists. Some time ago, when speaking to the writer about his dignity as an officer of the Legion of Honour, he remarked: 'The part of my success which gave me the least pleasure, perhaps, was my advancement in the Legion of Honour to the degree of officer. I remember well, it was seven years ago, and I was watching Mounet-Sully playing the part of Hamlet in a box at the Théâtre Français, and just when the curtain fell on the first act, and I had risen, saying, "I must go and embrace Mounet; he has been sublime!" I felt myself plucked by the sleeve, and, looking round, saw Floquet. He seemed much excited, and said: "I have a piece of good news for you, Daudet. It is settled. Your nomination as an officer of the Legion of Honour will appear in to-morrow's *Journal Officiel.*" And I said: "Oh, I can't stop to talk about that now. I must go and kiss Mounet, who has been magnificent!" And I remember reading in Floquet's eyes that he did not believe that my indifference was sincere. These

people who decorate us against our will—I am sure that I never solicited any such honour, and if I did not refuse it, it was only because it is priggish to refuse it, because it gets one talked about—these people, I say, are all people who themselves are not decorated, who seem to despise the reward which they dangle before our eyes, saying: "If you are good boys, and write properly, you shall have this pretty cross." They treat us like children, despising themselves what they hold out to us as such a great inducement. Floquet wouldn't believe that I did not care one snap of the fingers for his rosette, and that all I wanted was to be allowed to get away behind the scenes and to compliment Mounet on his success. When I saw the news officially announced next day, I felt sorry because I had received this distinction above the head of De Goncourt, and I feared lest De Goncourt would feel hurt at the preference accorded to me.'

De Goncourt, by the way, cares even less for the ribbons of the French Government. In one passage of his Diary he expresses his intention to ask the Minister to strike his name off the rolls of the Legion of Honour.

Zola, on the other hand, does not conceal his satisfaction in the possession of the officer's rosette, which was only given him on the conclusion of the

Rougon-Macquart series. He is fully entitled to every satisfaction that his heroic life has won for him.

Daudet's literary activity was naturally interrupted by the 'terrible year,' which for him, at least, was laden with treasure in the shape of observations to be made, incidents to be marked down, characters to be studied, and emotions to be experienced. Many are the admirable tales which he has written about the war. 'Contes du Lundi' contain several masterpieces which are the result of his experiences and reflections during this troubled period. Many consider his 'La Dernière Classe' and 'La Partie de Billard' in this volume his two best stories. Certainly, the pathos of the subject in the former, and the wonderful picturesqueness of the style in the latter, place them altogether in the forefront of his literary achievements.

De Maupassant would have been pleased to write the story 'Le Siège de Berlin,' where a pious family delude a dying veteran in Paris during the siege with fictitious reports of the victories of the French troops. In this story, by the way, as in certain others in the same book, a defect—excusable, perhaps, but none the less regrettable—is to be commented upon, namely, the abuse of coincidences. The veteran in this story falls dead at the very

moment when he recognises that he has been deceived, that it is the Prussians, and not the victorious French army, who are marching into Paris. In other stories, also, we find the heroes falling dead just at the critical moment, and even the chances of pathology do not warrant such extermination. It is a perversion of the dramatic sense.

In 'Robert Helmont,' on the other hand, proportion is altogether observed, and we have here a vivid and altogether truthful set of pictures of the great and terrible drama. The peasant with his pruning-shears, who murders stray Prussians in the forest of Sennart, is a character worthy of classical tragedy. Daudet has recorded that it was the war that first set him thinking of the seriousness of life. There is no doubt that the stress through which, in common with all his fellow-citizens, he passed during that period influenced him greatly for the good. It opened his eyes, as it did the eyes of most of his compatriots, to the fact that, however charming might be the existence of a butterfly, the butterfly by its very lightness runs serious risk of extermination.

He relates that no period of his life is more vividly stamped on his memory than the period of the war. 'That year,' he told the writer, 'is as clear in my mind as if it were yesterday. I can see

the unlit streets, and the slouching shadows passing through them. I remember, as if they had just crossed my lips, the infamous fricassees that we ate.' He did not go to the front, but remained in Paris, and during the siege was incorporated in the National Guards. 'I was a soldier at the time, and, oh! so energetic and full of life. It was the most active period of my existence. I was always a *batailleur*, fond of sword-play and the hazards of combat, and I think that that period was the most intense of my existence. One date that I remember most vividly was October 31, when the news of the surrender of Metz reached Paris. I was then in the 97th *de marche*, and was sent to communicate the news on a winter's morning to Myre de Villiers, who took me with him to carry it to the soldiers in the different forts round Paris. What a heartrending business it was! At each fort the General was surrounded by the men. "Metz has surrendered! We have been betrayed! Bazaine has turned a traitor!" was what we had to say. I can remember some who burst into tears, others who threw down their guns and swore horribly. It was a great and a terrible experience.'

A picture of Alphonse Daudet during the war, in the performance of his military duties, may be of interest: 'The scene takes place in the month of

January, 1871. A battalion of the National Guard is encamped outside the fortifications, whose duty it is to watch the Versailles gate. A number of soldiers are seen to leave the battalion and to advance into the open. This is to post a sentry at the junction of two high-roads. This sentry is quite a young man, a *bleu*, who no doubt has never served before. He wears large spectacles, the spectacles of a short-sighted man, and on his military cloak gleams the cross of the Legion of Honour. He walks up and down, stamping his feet to warm them, clutching his rifle, which, in spite of his woollen gloves, freezes his fingers, and hums a soldier's song. Hours go by, and the sky grows dark. Vague murmurs rise from the white plain, now lighted only by the wan beams of the moon. The young soldier glances at the horizon with anxiety. Has he been forgotten? Has the battalion returned to Paris? Why has he not been relieved? Suddenly he starts. A sound of steps has fallen on his ear. He stands on guard. "Who goes there?" "Officer's round." "Give the countersign." It is indeed an officer, a superior officer, a colonel. Our private is already presenting arms, when the Colonel calls out: "Daudet!" "Claretie!" "And what are you doing here, my poor Daudet?" "As you may see, Colonel, I am on sentry duty." "Poor fellow! why, you are frozen

to death." "Yes, I am." "Come on, you must come with me." And off they go together, Private Daudet and Colonel Claretie, arm-in-arm, both shivering with the cold, but delighted at this happy meeting.'

When the Commune broke out Daudet left Paris. His reflections as to what might have become of him if he had allowed himself to be carried away by the fever, which at that time had infected most of his fellow-citizens, may be found most eloquently set forth in his address to 'Mon Képi' in the 'Contes du Lundi.'

Returning to Paris after the re-establishment of order, he set to work on the immense quantity of material which he had collected during the previous twelve months, and it was then that the stories of the war which are to be found in 'Robert Helmont' and the 'Contes du Lundi' were written. At the same time (in 1872) he made another bid for success as a playwright, and produced a melodrama, 'Lise Tavernier,' at the Ambigu in the course of that year. The piece was badly mounted, because the manager was a man without capital, and failed completely on this or other accounts. He has not thought fit to republish it amongst his dramatic works.

At the age, then, of thirty-two we find Alphonse

Daudet already known to fame as the author of two successful plays, of numerous remarkable short stories, and of two long novels (of which one had been fairly successful, and the other was pushing its way towards an almost unparalleled popularity), a writer distinguished by the Government, the husband of a distinguished wife, and the father of a child of the greatest promise. And yet, such has been his career since, that it may be said of him that at that period he was not even on the threshold of his future greatness.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### 'FROMONT JEUNE ET RISLER AÎNÉ.'

'EGLI ci tiene a quella disgraziata Arlésienne.' Thus the noted Italian publicist, Edmondo de Amicis, wrote years ago about Alphonse Daudet. And, indeed, perhaps the one little grudge that Alphonse Daudet does bear against Fortune is, that at the time when its success would most have pleased him, his play, 'L'Arlésienne,' failed. Let it be stated at once, that since that notable first performance, on the night of October 1, 1872, at the Vaudeville Theatre, when a cynical boulevard audience laughed away this poetical idyll, the play has met with better receptions at various revivals. It 'has made its million,' to quote the coarse, if eloquent, words of a theatrical manager who spoke about it to the writer at Daudet's house, and it is to-day looked upon as a piece that will draw money under certain favourable conditions of public feeling.

But Daudet does not seem ever to have for-

given or forgotten that *chute notable*, as Zola calls it. That is not difficult to understand. It contains much of his best work, all the poetry of his Provence, and a certain dramatic originality which must have been indulged in by the author with the firm determination to stand or fall thereby. Having fallen, his mortification could only be the greater. It was doubtless this originality of treatment which displeased the public. Originality is the last desire of a theatre-going public. In 'L'Arlésienne' the spectator is unceasingly exercised about a woman of Arles, who never appears on the stage, a person not only mute, but invisible. This is a very delicate conception, but it irritates your ordinary play-goer. 'Where is the Arlésienne?' he cries. 'Produce her.' And when the author does not produce her, but continues until the fall of the last curtain to suggest her, the playgoer will not admit that there can be any such person. He has all the indignation that was felt by Betsy Prig on a notable occasion. It is invariably unsafe to provoke a curiosity in the playgoer which is not to be satisfied.

In dramatic writing, certain vulgarities of curiosity have to be regarded, to which originality must be sacrificed. Ernest Daudet opines that the public of Paris was sated with things Provençal by the production of 'Mireille,' which it had applauded.

Zola says that the play failed because 'it was altogether too novel,' adding that 'the piece had the immense fault of having an accent, a language all of its own.' When one of the characters in the play spoke of ortolans singing, everybody in the theatre laughed. The only song of the ortolan that the Parisian knows is its frizzling murmur as the spit glides round. This laughter more especially wounded Daudet's heart, and in conversation with De Amicis, years afterwards, he vindicated the song of the ortolan—'si mise a imitare il loro trillo'—removing from his mouth a pipe, presented to him by Flaubert, to do so. They laughed at the love-scene between the old shepherd and the aged wife of a former employer, whom he had left because he felt that a guilty love was springing up in his heart for her, and did not meet again till age in him and her had removed all danger of guilt. The boulevard Parisian could not, of course, be expected to believe in a sacrifice of this sort, nor to admit it on a stage where, as Heine said, adultery is the manure from which modern French play-writing almost entirely draws its life. The play failed, in spite of its intrinsic charm, in spite of Bizet's music. The poetical story therein dramatized may be read in the tale entitled 'L'Arlésienne' in the 'Lettres de mon Moulin.'

'Risero dell' "Arlésienne" e applaudirono "Fromont Jeune"' (they laughed at 'L'Arlésienne,' and they were about to applaud 'Fromont Jeune') said Daudet to De Amicis, who adds that, after making this remark, Daudet shrugged his shoulders ('E scrollò le spallé').

Yet it was during one of the rehearsals of this play that Daudet first conceived the germ-idea of the story which was to bring him fame and fortune. It struck him whilst listening to his piece that the Parisians would no doubt be more interested in a story nearer to their hearts, 'unrolling itself in their atmosphere.' He was at that time living in the Marais quarter of Paris, and it seemed to him that this would be an excellent background for a story of modern Parisian life.

The Daudets were residing in a flat in a house which had at one time been the mansion of the Lamoignon family, illustrious in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the magistracy of Paris, a house which De Goncourt describes as 'a piece of the Louvre, inhabited — in these numerous little lodgings into which the immense apartments of former days have been cut up — by numberless industries, the names of which are to be read on the stone landings of the staircases. This was the very house to live in to write "Fromont Jeune et Risler

Aîné."' Daudet, who lived here from 1868 onwards, used to say that the quiet, laborious atmosphere of this house had done much towards pacifying the ardour of his temperament, and had inspired him with a taste for industry.

Having found his background, it seemed to him that a partnership between two partners of entirely different natures would afford the subject of an admirable study of character and modern life. His early reminiscences of his father's unfortunate partnerships satisfied him of the picturesqueness of the contrasts to be drawn from 'this commercial collaboration, where mutual interests couple together in unremitting toil, and sometimes for years together, beings different in temperament and in education.' It was natural that on to this idea the second one, of a jealousy between the wives of the two partners whom he proposed to depict, should graft itself; that one of the two women should be as noble as the other was contemptible; that the noble wife should have a contemptible husband, and that the contemptible wife should be married to the noble husband. 'Unfortunately,' he adds, 'there must be passion in a play.' For the original idea of 'Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné' was for a stage play, and the plot was conceived from a playwright's point of view. It accordingly became necessary to

create a base intrigue between the two characters predestined to base intrigue, the contemptible wife and the contemptible husband.

The unjust reception accorded to 'L'Arlésienne' disgusted Daudet, for the time being, with the stage, and he accordingly determined to write this story as a novel, not as a play.

In his account of this book, given in 'Trente Ans de Paris,' Alphonse Daudet declares that all the characters in '"Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné" existed, and may be living still.' The old miser, Gardinois, Madame Fromont's grandfather, was, Daudet declares, one of his friends, and if he sacrificed him to his book, it was because 'he could not suppress this type of terrible and selfish old man.' Planus, the cashier, was an Alsatian cashier in the Rue de Londres, by name Schérer. Risler was an Alsatian, who had worked in the Daudets' factory in Nîmes. The immortal Delobelle was made up of various types of pretentious, inefficient actors, such as every playwright may meet in the world that surges round the playhouse. Sidonie is also copied from nature, but Daudet says that the original was not so bad as the heroine of his story. However this may be, there are certainly thousands of Sidonies to be met with any day in a few hours' walk in the streets of Paris. The frivolous, heart-

less woman, with neither religion nor scruples, and no motives other than vanity and ambition, warped by instinctive perversity, which the perversity of modern Parisian life has intensified, is one of the commonest types of the French capital, and is likely to become even more common with the progressive decline of all religious influence, and the continued increase of demoralizing literature.

In connection with this book Daudet declares very emphatically that he does not invent his characters; he copies them from nature. Some are direct copies, trait for trait, as was Jansoulet, otherwise 'the Nabob,' photographed from one of the friends of the Daudet family, a man named François Bravay, who, like the Nabob, had made an immense fortune in the East, and was ruined in Paris. In certain cases, moreover, Daudet has not even changed the names of the persons from whom he has drawn his characters. The handsome Mangin, who marries Roudic's daughter in 'Jack,' and has no conversation other than about custom-house tariffs, lived in the flesh and was known by the same name. This practice accounts for the striking truthfulness to life which delights the reader in Daudet's characterization. At the same time, many of his characters are composite photographs, so to speak, and in most of these, as in Numa

Roumestan, or Elysée Méraut, for instance, his own moral features have entered largely into the composition. A natural consequence of his admission of this process has been that in many of his characters people have detected resemblances to living persons from whom the author had never drawn. A notable instance of this was in the case of Numa Roumestan, who, as has been said, is largely Daudet himself, and, in spite of this, and the author's repeated denials, was considered a not kindly portrait of Gambetta.

Daudet's process of collecting materials has never varied during all the years in which he has followed a literary career. Mention has been made of the little notebooks which he invariably carries about with him. Day after day, during all these years, there have been noted down in these little notebooks, of which Daudet has amassed a very large collection, descriptions of scenery, thoughts, names of persons and places, traits of character, characteristic sayings, striking anecdotes, pen-portraits of persons of notable appearance, suggestions for plots, and all the brick and mortar of literary construction. This habit of perpetually note-taking became eventually with Alphonse Daudet a very mania. In his library may be found books, the margins of which are covered with fine and delicate writing.

These margins were the only paper at hand when such or such a note was to be made, and were used accordingly.

The writer remembers picking up a book on Daudet's table which bore on the cover the title 'Impressions.' It was the work of some scribe jealous of De la Rochefoucauld's laurels, and the book, a book of many pages, contained short maxims, pretentiously set out, one to each page, a minimum of text to a maximum of margin. All the blank spaces of this book were covered with Daudet's notes. 'It was a capital book,' he said; 'there was so much paper in it.' To the writer's question, whether by a coincidence any of the author's maxims had had a bearing on the subject treated in the notes written on the pages on which they were printed, Daudet answered that he did not know, as he had not read the maxims.

Zola's note-taking is quite as ample and laborious, but this writer does not lay up store for future use, and brings out his pencil and notebook only for the book actually in preparation. Daudet collects and collects, a regular magazine, without being sure that this material, or that, will ever be used. Nor has he any system of indexing or of classification. He depends on a remarkable memory to guide him to the booklet in which a particular note of which he

may stand in need is to be found. When he has decided on a book, and mapped out the plot, he goes to his storehouse for materials, just as a weaver goes to his storehouse for the yarns which are to be woven into a fabric. He takes sunshine here, gloom there; here virtue, there vice; and on a broad palette presses out the various colours as he thinks they may be required.

In the description of the evolution of this novel, Daudet pays a high compliment to his wife. After stating that it is his habit to talk over his books in preparation with anyone who will listen to him, and that this mute collaboration assists him in elucidating his subject, in appraising the value of certain passages, and in discovering certain valuable developments which might otherwise not have suggested themselves to him, he adds: 'But it is my wife who has chiefly had to endure these repetitions in the discussion of my work, when the subject is turned over and over twenty times in succession: "What do you think about making Sidonie die?" "Supposing I were to let Risler live?" "What ought Delobelle or Frantz or Claire to say under such circumstances?" And so on from morning till night, at every minute of the day, at meals, in the cab, on the way to the theatre, on the way home from an evening party, during the long cab-drives

through the silence and the slumber of Paris. Oh, luckless wives of artists! It is true that my wife is so thorough an artist herself that she has taken a great part in all that I have written. Not a page of mine she has not read over or touched up, or over which she has not scattered a little of her beautiful azure and gold powder.' It is worthy of notice in this account that Daudet asserts that he is liable at any moment, before the actual writing of the book, to alter the destinies of the characters, which shows that in novel-writing, also, his nature of *improvisatore* abides by him.

'Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné' was written in 1873, and first appeared in serial form in a periodical called *Le Bien Public*. It here attracted considerable attention. 'For the first time,' writes Daudet, 'I felt around my work the earnest interest of the crowd. Claire and Désirée had friends; I was blamed for killing Risler, and people wrote to me to intercede for the little crippled girl.' Readers of Dickens will remember that this was also the experience of the English novelist, and that there are to-day living people who consider him a heartless man for having killed Little Nell in spite of their intercessions. The story was published in book-form in 1874, and was a great success from the very beginning. Some days after its publication, Daudet

went 'all trembling' to the publisher's office to ask how the first edition was selling, and heard that a second edition had already been called for. The demand grew and grew, and edition followed edition. From all parts of the world came applications for the purchase of the rights of translation—from Italy, from Germany, from Spain, from Sweden, from Denmark, and, last of all, from England. 'England,' writes Daudet, 'is the country into which I took the longest time to penetrate, in spite of a love for the intimacy of home-life, which, it seems to me, should have been more appreciated there than anywhere else.'

Daudet was at that time one of a select society of 'authors who had been hissed,' which used to meet once a month at some restaurant for a dinner, known amongst themselves as the dinner '*des auteurs sifflés*.' The other members of this select society were Gustave Flaubert, mortified that his better works did not find the same success as 'Madame Bovary,' a creation of his which in his last years became to him a very Frankenstein; Zola, who was still struggling with the public indifference towards the Rougon-Macquarts; De Goncourt, who, in spite of an immense productiveness, and the honour of having entirely revolutionized French literature, was practically unknown, and where known, ridiculed rather

than applauded; Daudet, with the laughter against 'Lise Tavernier' and 'L'Arlésienne' ringing in his ears; and Tourgueneff, 'when he was not troubled with the gout,' who, in his own country, was held no prophet, and had come to seek sympathy, if not appreciation, in France.

Daudet relates that, as the success of 'Fromont Jeune' grew and grew, he became almost ashamed to present himself before his less fortunate friends. 'How many thousands since we last met?' was the question that used to be put to him when he made his appearance, and it was with a certain hesitation that he used to name the figure. 'Really, I did not know where to hide myself and my success.' Zola would mournfully remark on such occasions, for himself and the others: 'Our books will never sell. No, we shall never sell,' a prophecy which subsequent events were to refute in a striking manner.

De Goncourt gives an account of the reception accorded to this novel in the drawing-room of Princess Mathilde, where it was read out aloud to a large company, whilst Her Royal Highness amused herself with colouring little bits of paper with a paint-brush.

The critics gave the book a very favourable reception. 'Applaudirono Fromont,' said Daudet to De Amicis. Zola found its action 'clean-cut and

characteristic.' He specially admires the character, as a creation, of Sidonie, and applies to her an expression which he was afterwards to use about his more businesslike Sidonie, Nana, 'C'est un champignon poussé dans le ruisseau parisien,' which suggests the idea that there may be some kinship between the two women. He adds that it is in the creation of Risler and of Sidonie that Daudet especially reveals himself as a powerful novelist. In his conclusion he remarks that 'great novelists may be recognised by this, that they are, before anything else, the creators of living beings.' One finds some difficulty in reconciling this opinion with one's knowledge of the process by which the characters of the great novelists of the present day in France, including Zola himself, De Goncourt, and Alphonse Daudet, are generated. Photography, even in composite, is not creation. The method is an admirable one, but it bears the same relation to the creation of Shakespeare, for instance, or of George Eliot, that 'process' does to wood-engraving.

In whatever manner, however, the characters in 'Fromont Jeune' may have been generated, the fact remains that they are singly and severally interesting, and that their actions are in a noteworthy degree what one would expect from the acquaintance possessed by the reader with their various

moral temperaments. Not continuously so, however. For instance, it is questionable whether so frivolous a creature as Sidonie, bad as we know her to be, would have had enough energy and force of will to carry out the villainous plot by which she secures from her husband's brother the confession of his guilty love for her, which afterwards deals Risler his death-blow. The intelligence necessary for scheming of this description would have guided her in paths as pleasant as, but less dangerous than, those which she is seen to follow. And, again, imprudence is always the companion of guilt, and here we have a guilty woman who displays a prudence worthy of the veriest Hausfrau. Nor does one believe that Frantz would have desired an elopement with his brother's wife. He came of a stock too practical for any nonsense of the kind. A living Frantz would have managed matters without any extravagances of this sort. He is doing it every day of his despicable little life in the Paris of to-day, as no doubt he was doing it in the days when 'Fromont Jeune' was written. Napoleon very neatly defined adultery as practised in France when he said that it was 'une affaire de canapé.' Elsewhere it may be a matter of elopement, but not in Paris, and not between a Frantz and a Sidonie. Risler, again, is a splendid character; but in the

*dénouement* he rises from the natural to the supernatural. It is true that amongst the middle classes in Paris adultery is not looked upon with the horror that it excites elsewhere, because marriage in France is always more or less of a commercial contract, and it is therefore possible that, having failed in one commercial association—namely, in his marriage—Risler would be all the more willing to maintain in its integrity the other commercial association in which he was interested—his partnership with the individual who had wrecked the former. But one finds it hard to believe that even under these considerations a man like Risler could have consented to live on in the house of his betrayer, in hourly communication with a detested presence—nay, more than this, could have consented to work for him in an inferior capacity, at the very time when every fibre in his body must have been strained, under the lash of an outraged pride, to prove himself the superior of the man who had been preferred to him.

When Charles Bovary tells Rodolphe, his betrayer, when he meets him after his wife's death, that he bears him no grudge, one cannot help finding him rather contemptible, in spite of the immense pity and pathos of the situation, because there are certain situations in life in which no com-

promise between nature and sentiment is possible. Certainly, Risler does endeavour to manifest his superiority, but a moral superiority only, and the phase is here purely physical. Moreover, the author does not point out that it was to prove even a moral superiority that Risler acted as he did after his discovery, but describes his action as prompted by a desire to save the fortunes of the commercial firm and the jointure of his partner's wife.

The suicide of Risler, again, is a sacrifice to the exigencies of sentimentality, just as was the death of 'Mother Jacques' in 'Le Petit Chose.' One does not believe that Risler would have killed himself because he found a letter, sent him by Sidonie, which revealed to him that his brother had endeavoured to betray him. If, as a practical man, he had believed in the authenticity of the letter, if his knowledge of his wife's villainy had not prompted him to suspect the value of this piece of documentary evidence, the terrible disillusion caused him by his wife's ill conduct would have prepared him for ill conduct of any and every kind from any and every body, even from his brother. And one fancies that a genuine flesh-and-blood Risler would have concluded that, if betrayer there had to be, it

might as well have been Frantz as Fromont—at least, so De Maupassant would have written.

The fault of this novel is that we are given Faubourg St. Germain sentiments on a Marais stage. Daudet animates modern life with his own temperament, which is that of a poet and of a man of great good-heartedness. But there is little poetry and less good-heartedness in modern life, and especially is there little in the lower and middle classes. Whether this infusion of poetry and good-heartedness into a sordid body is a commendable practice or not is another question, the answer to which depends on the view one takes of the real functions of the novel. For those who read a novel with little care as to the functions of the novel, and desire only to be interested, amused, and affected, 'Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné' will always appear a masterpiece. It may be noted, however, that although it has obtained a very great success, and is to-day in its ninety-fifth edition, there are others of Daudet's novels in which this fault is very much less pronounced, as, for instance, 'Sapho,' which has been received with even greater appreciation.

The jubilation of the 'Fromont dance' was all the more natural, seeing that at one stroke Daudet had proved that it was as easy for him to succeed in a

long work as in the short efforts with which, till then, his name had been associated. Just at the time when the public was preparing to ticket him a *nouvelliste*, he affirmed himself a novelist, a description only possible in macaronic prose.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FROM SUCCESS TO SUCCESS.

'DAUDET is a handsome lad, with magnificent hair, which he is constantly in the habit of throwing back with a superb gesture, while in the management of his single eyeglass he reminds one of Scholl.' This is a portrait sketched about the time of the appearance of 'Fromont Jeune' by De Goncourt, who had made, one year previously, at the house of Gustave Flaubert, the acquaintance of the striking young man whom he had seen applauding violently at the ill-fated performance of his play, 'Henriette Maréchal.' From this period down to the present day the friendship between Alphonse Daudet and Edmond de Goncourt has grown, till to-day it is a friendship that can only be severed by what severs all human ties. It is a friendship to which both owe much. To Daudet it has brought, during a period of intolerable suffering, both encouragement and sustenance. De Goncourt, on the

other hand, has been able to console himself with the whole-souled admiration of the younger artist for the disappointments which all his life long have singularly beset this gentleman of letters, too fine, too delicate, too much, in short, of an artist and aristocrat, to be rightly appreciated by a turbulent democracy. It is a friendship which it is pleasant to behold, and it only seems right that Daudet, with his belief in humanity, should enjoy the best that humanity has to offer—the friendship of a great and pre-eminent man.

The libellers, who can leave no sacred thing unsoiled, have, indeed, essayed to traduce this perfect union of two brother-souls, and there are those whose incredible malice has prompted them to state that Daudet has a material interest in his friendship with a gentleman who possesses one of the rarest artistic collections of any in France, a lie which is all the more unwarrantable, seeing that for the past ten years De Goncourt's will and testament has been in the hands of Alphonse Daudet, his appointed executor; that Daudet has no interest whatever in his friend's inheritance; and that this fact was long since made public in connection with some malicious libel of the sort in a letter contributed by De Goncourt to the public press.

The interest that Alphonse Daudet has in his

friendship with De Goncourt is far greater and more enviable than that resting on any sordid speculation, could one fancy any such to exist in Alphonse Daudet's mind. It is the daily society of a man who has always held art the highest cult in the world, a perfect artist, endowed with an extraordinarily acute sense of style and colour and form, which reveals a temperament such as, perhaps, Sarah Bernhardt alone of living contemporaries possesses. And in the case of De Goncourt this artistic sense is not mere fibre. It has all the muscle of wide reading and an encyclopædic knowledge of all subjects to which by natural selection his interest has attached itself. He is a great writer. His history of Marie Antoinette, written in collaboration with his brother Jules, is one masterpiece out of many. Their histories of French society under the Revolution and under the Directorate are books which no student of the history of that period can afford to neglect, just as they are works which none curious as to the application of a sense of style to historical writing can afford to overlook. His 'Actresses of the Eighteenth Century' are three monographs which are literary miniatures that can be compared to such miniature portraits as Meissonnier, with his knowledge of technique, might have painted, if he had had the artistic temperament of Whistler. De

Goncourt, with his 'Germinie Lacerteux,' his 'Chérie,' 'La Faustin,' and 'La Fille Elisa,' was the writer who sowed the crop which other naturalist writers have reaped. If it was not given to him to reap what he had sown, that was because the public, the bestower of harvests, could not believe in the sincerity of a *gentilhomme* who occupied himself with the offscourings of the proletariate. It is a public which can hardly credit the Vendée, and refuses to believe in any understanding between an Edmond Huot de Goncourt and a Jupillon.

De Goncourt suffers also as Byron suffered, for in France, too, the craft of letters has not been one that aristocrats have been known to pursue. Honoré de Balzac dropped the particle of nobility when he sat down to his writing-table.

De Goncourt's Diary, of which six volumes have now been published, is a book which no writer can dispense with. It contains more wit, more anecdote, more character-painting, more literary perfume and artistic colour, than any book that one can call to mind. There is in its pages the equipment of a hundred novelists, both in plot, psychological analysis, character-study, scene-painting, epigram, and maxim, and the wherewithal to fit out a thousand writers of leading articles with new and striking subjects. His is indeed a striking figure

DAUDET'S HOUSE AT CHAMPROSAY.

*To face page* 394.

in modern French society, combining the presence of an English aristocrat with the manners of a French gentleman, and a conversation which takes one from Marivaux to Schopenhauer. His present life is spent between his marvellous home at Auteuil and the Daudets' town or country residence. So familiar is his presence either in the Rue de Bellechasse or at Champrosay, that, as one enters either abode, one looks round instinctively to see and greet him. He has become almost indispensable to Alphonse Daudet, and it is interesting to watch with what attention the younger artist listens to every word that he has to say. 'Don't speak,' he will sometimes say; 'I want to listen to De Goncourt.'

Encouraged by the success of 'Fromont Jeune,' and having danced the 'Pas de Fromont,' Daudet, the *cicade*, sat down to sing the song of 'Jack.' This was his second novel. It is noticeable about this book that its very size shows that Daudet's industry only needed encouragement to develop. It is a very long book, and Flaubert said about the two volumes in which it first appeared that 'there was too much paper in it.' In writing this story Daudet followed his invariable system. His Jack lived in the flesh, the son of pain of a woman of pleasure, who loved his mother, and who was misunderstood,

and slighted, and set aside, and died miserably. The subsidiary characters, already referred to in these pages, were reminiscences of life in the Quartier Latin, and the Brasserie des Martyrs. Daudet intends this book as a scourge, but all the knots have been picked out of the thongs. His pity here, also, has tempered the blast of his irony. For instance, he asks us to despise D'Argenton, and, indeed, in the latter part of the book he does his best to elicit our contempt. Yet such is his good nature towards his spiritual children, that in an early passage of the book he endows D'Argenton with the very qualities of which afterwards, as his anger grew hotter, he deprived him. D'Argenton is in the latter chapters of the book represented as a man of incorrigible laziness and utter selfishness, who desires success, but is not prepared to make any sacrifice to obtain it. Yet on page 118 of the Collection Guillaume edition of this book we find the following description of the man:

'At the age of twenty-seven he had succeeded in nothing, except in publishing at his own expense a volume of humanitarian poems, which had brought him down to bread and water for six months, and had been spoken of by nobody. Yet he worked very hard, he was endowed with faith and will; but these are forces which are ineffectual in poetry,

which above all else demands the possession of wings. D'Argenton had no wings.'

So here Daudet's pity inspires us with compassion for the very man whom afterwards he asks his readers to despise as a man having wings, yet too selfish and too lazy to use them. It is true that pity in man lies very near to cruelty.

In 'Trente Ans de Paris' Daudet describes the sources whence he drew his materials for his book. We learn that here also all the characters are drawn from persons whom the author knew; that Doctor Rivals was Doctor Rouffy of Draveil, near Champrosay; that Mangin was Mangin, and that Labassindre, Hirsch and Moronval all vapoured in the flesh.

The book was written for the most part at Champrosay, 'in the security of independence, and the reassuring sensation of being all alone with one's idea.'

'Long before daybreak,' he relates, 'I was at my deal-wood table in my dressing-room, only two paces away from my bed. I wrote by lamplight.'

The story began to appear in Dalloz's *Moniteur* long before the book was finished, and Daudet wrote under the whip of the printing-press. He declares that the advantage of this system of publication, so far as he is concerned, has been that it has forced

him to detach himself from the successive portions of the book, when his instinct would have prompted him to re-write and re-write again. The book appeared in its bulky volume form in 1875 at Dentu's publishing house. It was well received, but its success did not warrant a 'Pas de Jack.' Yet George Sand wrote to the author that she had been so affected by reading it that she had been unable to work for three whole days. It is to-day in its eighty-ninth edition.

Zola devotes eight pages—three days' work—to his criticism of this tale. He does not praise it beyond measure, but he finds many of the characters well drawn, and he describes as a masterpiece the scene in which a steam-engine, manufactured at the Indret works, where Jack is employed as a workman, is shipped on board a steamer. This personification of inert matter, to which the skill of man gives life, pleased the critic greatly, so much so that in 'Germinal' he, in his turn, in the notable scene where the works of the inundated mine are swallowed up in the sinking soil, invested the inert matter of a steam-pump with a living personality, and afterwards expanded the idea in 'La Bête Humaine.'

'Jack' is the very touching story of the son of pain of a woman of pleasure. But for the fact that

Daudet has been classified amongst the realists, the painters of modern life as it really is, there could be found no fault with it. It interests from beginning to end, it affects to tears, and in parts it excites a merry and pleasant hilarity. What could be funnier, for instance, than the story of the little prince of Dahomey, who, after being received into the Moronval *pensionnat* with the honours due to his rank, sinks, after the dethronement of his sable father, into the position of a drudge, and yet always hopes, thanks to the amulet which he wears, to return to Dahomey as king, 'to write nice little letter to Papa Stick, to get him come out there and then cut off his head in big basin, and make drum of his skin for to go and fight the Ashantees'? Or what more pathetically humorous than the story of Bélisaire, the hawker, who suffered tortures from his ill-fitting boots, and meant some day to buy another pair, but never did, a trait borrowed from the history of Edouard Drumont, who, however, unlike Bélisaire, has come to be able to afford comfortable foot-gear. But there are one or two little blemishes which must be commented upon in a realist writer. Of these, one is the pity which tempers the irony, as has already been set forth. Another, for instance, is the conduct of D'Argenton in founding a review at his own cost. The *raté* founds no review at his

own charges. He has such an arrogant belief in himself that he always expects to be financed. But supposing that D'Argenton, as an exception, had put his own moneys into such a speculation, can one be expected to believe that he would call round him as collaborators—nay, as his own collaborators—the wretched frauds with whom his own obscurity had forced him to live? No! The very essence of a society of failures is that, whilst each individual failure believes himself a paragon, he looks upon his fellow-obscurities, with whom he is forced to associate in a common outermost darkness, as the most despicable of men. The gnashing of teeth which one knows so well proceeds from the indignation that each individual feels at the companionship thus forced upon him, and D'Argenton, had he been enabled by fortune to emerge, would above all things have striven to shake off with his gloomy past his gloomy companions. For Daudet insists that there was not a spark of generosity in the man's nature, and this being so, why should he be kind to Hirsch, Labassindre, or Moronval, when he was so very unkind to Jack?

When 'Jack' was commenced, Alphonse Daudet was already at work on the 'Nabab,' which in many respects is the best of his novels. In this book he seems to have looked on life as it is, and

not athwart his own poetic and optimistic temperament. The character of Jansoulet is as admirable in its strength and in its weakness as that of Monpavon is in its foppery, and that of the blackmailing journalist in its persistent infamy. The material, it is true, was abundant and excellent. For Mora there was De Morny, the 'Richelieu-Brummel' of Daudet's younger days; for Jansoulet there was François Bravay; for the blackmailing journalist there were a hundred and one well-dressed gentlemen taking their absinthe outside Tortoni's or the Café Américain on any afternoon of the year; for the Père Joyeuse there was the Communard, to whom allusion has already been made; and for scenery there was Daudet's intimate knowledge of Paris, and the note-books brought back from Corsica. Of this material Daudet made indeed most excellent use, and the pictures in 'Le Nabab' of Parisian life of the period are as true as the Parisian impressions of De Nittis, which one may admire in the Luxembourg Gallery. It is to-day in its hundredth edition, and Charpentier is taking fresh stereos from the existing matrices. It may be mentioned, in passing, that François Bravay's family was offended at the use made of François Bravay's personality, though it is difficult indeed to understand what exception even his most

devoted relations could take to a portrait so entirely sympathetic and amiable.

During this period of literary activity we hear little of Daudet's private life. He remains the faithful friend of Flaubert, and a constant visitor to the little house in the Rue Murille, where, apart from himself, Tourgueneff, De Goncourt, and Zola, nobody ever goes. He visits Tourgueneff also, and in the community of their tastes in literature, and the closer community of a common love for music, grows very fond of the Russian, who, in his 'Souvenirs,' published after his death, aimed against Daudet's tender heart a Parthian shaft which wounded, and might have caused it to take a less loving view of humanity, but, to Daudet's credit, failed to achieve this result. Tourgueneff, with his house always full of flowers and ringing with musical voices, himself used to lie in long-drawn agony on his couch, watching his own sufferings with a view to describing them in realistic language to his friends at the Flaubert dinner. And all the while he was storing up in his Parthian mind the tiny exceptions which might be taken against Daudet as a man and as a writer, to be shot out in his 'Souvenirs,' and to wound a friend after his death.

In the meanwhile Alphonse Daudet was pro-

gressing from success to success. He had discovered his strength, and he gave it the fullest play. A series of masterpieces followed in succession upon the first books, which had solidly established his reputation as a writer of fiction. The writer who, when Edmond About consulted him as to his income in 1874, was able to appraise the public appreciation of his talent at £200 a year, after the publication of 'Fromont Jeune,' 'Le Nabab,' 'Jack,' and 'Les Rois en Exil,' was never earning less than £4,000 a year. And it is no 'fine feeling for the significance of big sales' that prompts this remark. For the world's discernment of the merits of an artist is to-day gauged not by the wreaths which he may wear, but by the amount of gold which a commercial democracy is willing to divert annually from its trafficking for his comfort and luxuries. The artist for whom the world will divert no gold may be an artist whose brow should be all obscured with laurel-wreaths, but he is not one in whom the world takes interest, or of whom a writer can write for the world's interest. And, all these things considered and most examples remembered, with the exception, perhaps, of Poe and De Nerval, amongst a few others, the fact that a commercial world has diverted some of its gold has always been a sure indication of merit on the part of the recipient.

Amongst the various novels which in due course have marked Alphonse Daudet's progress from success to success, special reference should be made to that excellent masterpiece 'Sapho,' a book which will survive if all Daudet's other books should pass away, and when the world's interest in French society in the latter half of the nineteenth century shall have died out, as tales which have been told are said to pass away; for 'Sapho' is a story which will move men as long as there are men and women, and men shall love women and women men, with those reserves which differentiate the attachment of the male from the attachment of the woman. It is a book which should be written in Latin, or, as an equivalent, carved on marble. For when the French language may be a forgotten tongue, and all our paper may have crumbled into dust, there will always be the love of man and woman, and in no book that one knows of have the possible pathos and the uncertain logic of this love been more masterfully expounded. Sapho has loved Gaudin, and has loved him with a woman's dog-like devotion. And he, with a jealousy of her past and an affection for his future, with passion underlying all, has turn by turn drawn her to him, repudiated her and drawn her back. And when the day comes on which he has put aside, under the

stimulus of his passion and an acquired affection, this jealousy of her past and this affection for his future, and would have her return for ever to his arms, she says him nay. She is too old. She needs to be loved for herself. She is afraid of the task of loving, where her love may again be repudiated. And in the end she prints one last kiss on his neck, 'on the place on your neck which you know of, my friend.' And all this is human and eternally true, and it shows that the poet, if he may make a bad realistic writer, will out with the truth, where the truth is a great and an eternal one. It is Daudet's masterpiece, and it is, one believes, the book by which he will always be remembered.

A word should also be said about 'Numa Roumestan,' which is of special interest, inasmuch as it shows us Provence and the Provençal as viewed by Alphonse Daudet after his vision had been modified by long years in Paris. So modified, both Provence and Provençal have lost their great attractions, and we are informed rather of the natural dustiness of the one and the moral 'dustiness' of the other. It retains, however, sufficient local colour to require for its due appreciation an acquired taste, and Daudet admitted this when, in a conversation with the writer, he remarked that Mounet made an unnatural Numa Roumestan, because he

had no comprehension of the Provençal of that particular type. Mounet laughed *en long* when he should have laughed *en large*, and, according to Daudet, all the point was there. The readers who laugh *en long*, both physically and morally, are accordingly not fitted to approach his book with due comprehension. In this respect it appeals to a smaller public than its merit would warrant. And had it not been for Daudet's Parisian modification of his view of Provence, this public might have been a still smaller one. At the same time it should be remarked that eighty thousand individuals of the said public have produced from their purses forty thousand crown pieces for the sake of possessing this book to read and read and read again. And how many have borrowed the book from each of these eighty thousand?

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE FATE OF POLYCRATES.

About a year ago the writer came to the Rue de Bellechasse to Alphonse Daudet's house, from the neighbouring Hôpital de la Charité. He had been present at certain hypnotic experiments performed by Doctor Luys, who had vouchsafed to him the information that, whilst in the hypnotic trance, his subjects could discern proceeding from the faces of persons on whom their attention was directed, whilst in that state, emanations of light, of which the colour differed according to the state of health of the person scrutinized. The robust and altogether healthy man, according to Doctor Luys, emitted from his person an effulgence similar to that which the hypnotized subject noticed as proceeding from the North Pole extremity of a magnet—that is to say, of a pleasant and hopeful blue colour. Other people affected with different diseases emitted now a green, now a purple, now a yellow effulgence,

according to the nature of their maladies. The man suffering from acute nervous disorders — so the Doctor's subjects informed him—appeared to them to be surrounded with a red light similar to that which these subjects also noticed at the South Pole extremity of the magnet. The writer informed Alphonse Daudet of these things, and Daudet said:

'I must be a mass of red effulgence. I had not heard of Doctor Luys's experiments, but there are times when I have felt that if a light were set to me I should blaze up in red flames. I am all red. I am very, very nervous.' Then, waving away the extravagances of the Hôpital de la Charité with his cigarette, he continued, 'I have worked too hard . . . and I have been too happy. I am paying for it now.'

'C'est Polycrate,' he added after awhile, 'ce tyran de Samos.'

Alphonse Daudet has worked hard. He has worked too hard. When the *cicade* was won over to ant-like laboriousness, like all renegades, he embraced his new faith with an exaggerated ardour. If he has not killed, but only crippled himself in the effort, it is because he was endowed by Nature with a physical constitution as remarkable as his moral temperament.

An extemporizer by nature, he has always been prevented by his literary conscience from indulging in this instinct. He has slaved and slaved, and still slaves and slaves.

'I write slowly, very slowly,' he told the writer; 'and revise and revise. I am never satisfied with my work. My novels I always write myself. I never could dictate a novel. As to my plays, I used formerly to dictate them. I had a certain talent in my legs, just as Napoleon had a certain genius in the legs of his soldiers. My books go through many processes. To begin with, I fill my note-books. Each note, as it is used, is scratched out in blue or red pencil. From these written notes and the tablets of my memory, "the *deltoi* of my memory," I write out in copybooks the first copy of my novel. I write this first copy on alternate pages of my copybooks, and leave the opposite sheet blank. When the book is finished in its rough state, I re-write it page by page on the blank sheets. The page on the right is the amended copy of the page on the left. Then my wife looks at this second copy, and suggests to me what improvements might be made. I note these down. Then I re-write the whole book again with the joy of a school-boy who feels that a wearisome task is ended. So that, apart from my notes, I write each manuscript

three times over, and, if I could do so, I would write it as many times more, for, as I have said, I am never satisfied with my work. But I am very irregular in my way of working. Sometimes I work for eighteen hours a day, and day by day. At other times I pass months without touching a pen.'

'"Le Petit Chose,"' said the writer.

He has worked too hard.

Thus, when writing 'Le Nabab,' the eight months which he devoted to the actual penmanship of this work, apart from the days of note-taking, the months of observation, and the years of experience, were spent almost entirely in his bedroom, transformed for the time being into a study. For weeks together he never set foot outside of his house, and many were the days when he worked for eighteen consecutive hours. His meals were set on the table at which he wrote, and he used to continue writing as soon as he had eaten. He has remarked that the function of digestion does not trouble his mind if he sets to work immediately after eating, that it is only after resting awhile after a meal that the familiar drowsiness makes itself felt. Even when asleep his mind continued active, and his dreams were, for the most part, about his book. At four o'clock every morning he used to spring from his bed, 'stammering sentences from his novel like a man in delirium.'

His room had been set to rights whilst he slept, so that he had but to dress and sit down at his little deal table. In the mornings, however, his mind was never very clear, and he accordingly used to occupy the first hours of the day in revising what he had written on the previous day, in correcting, copying, and preparing the day's task. It was towards nightfall that inspiration used to come to him, and that his pen began to gallop in a vain effort to keep pace with the exuberant flow of his thoughts. And this fine speed would be kept up for the best part of the night. And so on, day after day, so entirely absorbed that he would sometimes wake up to find himself writing by lamplight with a bright sun blazing outside. When the task had been completed, although already the idea of 'Les Rois en Exil' had been haunting him for some time past, he rested his brain for several weeks, and spent the time in fencing each day till the foil fell from his hand in very exhaustion. And then suddenly back to work again. This is how he has always worked.

'I am not one of those who, like Zola, can work a certain number of hours every day, and day after day. I abandon myself to the caprice of inspiration, and in turn pass through periods of cerebral excitement and periods of dead calm. For the last three months I have not written a line.' These

words, quoted from his own lips, merit attention, because they prove how very conscientious a writer he is. For the author who writes by inspiration and in a fine frenzy will very rarely be found revising, correcting, polishing, as Alphonse Daudet does, being so careful over his work as to make at least three copies of each book that he writes. For the fever of composition urges a man on and on, and here we have a writer, in whom this fever manifests itself in periods of great intensity, who yet has strength of will enough and sufficient artistic conscientiousness to hold himself back, and step by step to walk over again and again the ground over which he has just galloped, though every muscle in him strains to dash onward. The method of Zola is a very different one. He walks all the way, and between these two writers and the fable of the hare and the tortoise a comparison might be drawn, did not the hare in this case know how to transform itself into a tortoise as occasion requires.

In his method of work Alphonse Daudet differs greatly from his brother Ernest, whose great production is the result of steady and regular work. Ernest is a very hard worker, and is fortunate enough to be able to work at any time with equal appetite and lucidity. Some days he never leaves his handsome study in the Avenue Marceau, though,

as a general rule, he takes long walks every day, and works as he walks. He has achieved a very high place in French literature, and those who, out of political rancour, have essayed to ridicule his literary work, writing of him as 'Daudet—not the one who has talent, you know, the other,' have been unable to diminish his prestige. He is the author of several novels, but it is especially in political and historical writing that he has distinguished himself. His 'Mœurs des Temps,' originally published under the pseudonym 'Jacques Rigaud' in the *Figaro*, and his 'Coulisses de la Société Parisienne,' are studies of contemporary life in Paris which no student of French history will hereafter be able to overlook. The latter volume has met with considerable success, and a sequel is being prepared by its author. One is glad to find Ernest at last in pleasant places. The warm affection between him and Alphonse has never wavered. 'Such as it was when we entered on life,' he recently said to the writer, 'so it has always remained. It is cloudless and unalterable.' Yet in one or two respects the tastes of the two brothers have differed. Whilst Alphonse hates society and *salons*, Ernest, true to the predilection which he showed from the very first days of his life in Paris, may, in some measure, be described as a *mondain*. Yet he only frequents a few houses,

and those the best. It is to these tastes that we owe the two volumes on Parisian society mentioned above. Again, whilst Alphonse has always abhorred politics, Ernest, led into political life from the first by his relations with party journalism, has been forced to sacrifice a large part of his life to them. It is he who during the last five years has championed in the *Figaro* the movement by which the reaction, Orleanist and Bonapartist, has gradually rallied to the Republic.

Ernest Daudet, like Alphonse, has a son of literary tastes, George Daudet, who is a journalist, and acts as dramatic critic to the *Petit Moniteur*. He has recently founded a successful historical annual, *L'Annuaire Universel*. Ernest, like his brother, has a great fondness for the country, and spends three months in the year at a place called Les Petites Dalles, in Normandy, a wooded and secluded seaside place which he discovered.

If his literary fortune has not equalled that of his brother, and if it is of Alphonse Daudet that one rather thinks when their family name is mentioned, life, on the other hand, has in other respects been kinder to him. His maturity is a serene and placid one, and, close upon sixty years of age, he is as vigorous and alert as a young man. There are years of life and work before him.

It would appear, however, that Alphonse Daudet's method of work, excellent as have been the results in the matter of production, is a fatal one for the writer who adopts it. 'I deserve all that I am suffering,' he said to De Goncourt during one night of torture, as they were speeding north in an express train. 'I have abused my body too much.'

A mental fire is as beneficent as the fire of which Schiller wrote, but under the same conditions of restraint and supervision. And Daudet has neither restrained nor supervised. He has let it leap up into flame, and flicker down and then leap up again. And the result of this repeated over-exertion, combined, no doubt, with the ineradicable effects of the privations which he suffered as a young man, has been to wreck a body intended by nature to enjoy a vigour equal to that of his mind, which, thank Heaven, has never suffered.

As far back as fifteen years ago the first effects of these privations and these periods of over-exertion manifested themselves. It was at one of Flaubert's receptions. Those who were present noticed the waxen pallor of Daudet's hands. 'I wonder if I am going to be ill,' he said, with the air of a man who fancies that he has heard a knock at his door, but is not certain. 'Last night, though it gave me no pain, I had an attack of hæmorrhage

of the lungs. It frightens me; I must go and see Potain.'

A year later, during a dinner at Tourgueneff's, he is heard to say: 'I passed a week so full of the joy of life that I could have kissed the very trees, and then one night I coughed blood, so that my bed was stained all over. And now I cannot put my handkerchief to my mouth without looking to see if it be not stained.'

In 1884, as he returns from the funeral of his publisher, Dentu, he says that he has suffered so much of late that he never goes to a funeral without feeling a keen envy for the person who is being laid to rest, because that person will never suffer pain. In the same year he is heard to exclaim: 'I am always in pain, and this continuity of pain, and the prospect that this will always go on, are really hideous. Formerly I used to look forward to my bed. My bed was a hope. Now it is a thing full of ambushes and horrid surprises. I am forced to rise from it, to walk about, so as to wear my pain away. I suffer all that a man can suffer. My foot, for instance, feels sometimes as though a goods train were passing over it.'

In a conversation with the writer, he said that the only period in his life when he had thought of suicide was during the period of his life as an usher

at Alais School. Yet, in 1885, one morning after a night full of horrid surprises, he said that he had suffered so horribly, that the pain was so cruel, so wicked towards him, that there were moments when it was more than he could bear, and that at such times he found himself calculating how many drops of opium would be necessary to give him a final repose. 'This temptation haunts me,' he added, 'and I feel very frightened.'

When, at this time in his life, he again takes to absinthe, it is with the addition of laudanum. The active man, whom we have seen dashing about Paris, covering leagues by the score with Alfred Delvau on dusty highroads, or scaling mountains and scouring Provence with the athletic Mistral, is now so crippled that when one day his little son Lucien, in the garden down at Champrosay, cries out to him, 'Papa, run after me,' and toddles away, his feet refuse to obey his will, and 'beat the ground like the paddles of a steamer.'

For the last twelve years he has been forced to send himself to sleep with chloral, and to wake himself up with morphine. In the summer of the present year there were found on the gates of Champrosay traces that burglars, who might be expected to return, had visited his home. 'So for several nights,' he told the writer, 'I stopped taking my chloral grog, and, oh, it was terrible! No

sleep and continuous pain.' There are mornings when he wakes up and finds his hands 'shrivelled up like dried leaves.' The man in whom in his youth, the joy of life was so keen, is often heard to talk about death. 'There must be an infinite sweetness in the feeling of a cessation from all pain gradually stealing over one.'

He was talking not long ago with the writer about the 'sunny and dust-powdered days' of his youth, when, knapsack on back, he roamed whither his fancy guided him. 'I have always hoped,' he said, 'to go over the same ground again with my sons, to tell them of the ideas that had come to me in the various places, to translate to them the influence that the various scenes had had upon my temperament. And now I'm nothing—a cripple! It is a pity.'

It is indeed a pity, and a pity which is emphasized when one sees by Daudet's side the stalwart De Goncourt, now seventy years of age, firm and valiant, with the robustness of a young man, or thinks of Emile Zola, ferreting about Paris with serviceable legs and the most eupeptic digestion.

His moral suffering is very great, and though he patiently conceals it, it sometimes reveals itself. 'One would like to say one's say on the things that are happening,' he remarked one day, when the conversation had turned on the sordid Panama

scandals, and allusion had been made to a police-agent named Soinoury, whose passage-of-arms with Madame Cottu has not been forgotten. 'I can see him,' cried Daudet, 'this police official, full of his own importance, with his stupid disdain for women, proceeding from his ignorance of any real woman, stroking his whiskers. I can hear him say, "I'll soon get the little woman to tell me all she knows." Yes, I should like to say my say; I should like to write what Drumont writes, but there must be a rapier ready behind the pen.' And, as he spoke, he made a gesture as though to say, 'Think of me, as I am, with a rapier.'

Yet time was when Daudet was as ready with his rapier as with his pen. One remembers a famous soirée at the Odéon, when the 'Germinie Lacerteux' of his friend De Goncourt was being performed, and the public was offensive, and Alphonse Daudet and his son Léon were seen striding about the corridors of the theatre, ready to provoke the first person whom they might hear malevolently criticising. Each tried to calm the other, and each was the readier to blaze forth.

On the occasion when Daudet remarked that 'there must be a rapier ready behind the pen,' he added what is interesting and worthy of reproduction as to the extraordinary passiveness of the French people under the whips of a tribe of Soinourys:

'If the people have not revolted,' he said, 'and if there have been no revolutions caused by abominations which, only a few years ago, would have caused barricades to rise in every street of Paris, it is because, as I have noticed, a complete transformation has been effected in the character of the French people during the last ten or fifteen years by the militarism to which this country has been subjected since the enforcement of the new army laws. The fear of the corporal is upon every Frenchman, and it is discipline which keeps quiet the men who fifteen years ago would have protested at the point of the bayonet against the abominable scoundrels who are plundering France.'

The old combatant exists in Daudet in spite of his infirmities. He says his say, as occasion warrants. A few months ago he was sitting in a drawing-room, next to an advocate-general, who began a panegyric of a certain procureur-général who at one time was the most powerful man in France. 'I don't want to hear a word about him,' cried Daudet; 'he is a very detestable blackguard; the most contemptible rascal that I have ever heard of.'

Yes, the fate of Polycrates has befallen Alphonse Daudet also. 'I was too happy, and I am paying for it now,' he said. Which is what the crucified tyrant of Samos may also have said.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE DAUDET OF TO-DAY.

THERE are few homes in Paris which it is a greater privilege to frequent than the home of Alphonse Daudet. It is a privilege, however, which is open to all those who, by their allegiance to Art in any form, appeal to the sympathies of the master of the house. The shabbiest, frowsiest Bohemian who has written or painted or composed, or is just about to write or paint or compose, is assured of a welcome, a smile, and a cigarette, when, after mounting the most elegant staircase of any apartment-house in Paris, he rings at the door of Alphonse Daudet in the Rue de Bellechasse. For the Legitimist lives in a Legitimist quarter, not too far removed from the scene of his early struggles and the first blandishments of fortune.

Alphonse Daudet's study, to which immediate access is gained from the antechamber, is unlike all the other studies of Parisian men of letters. It has the

scrupulous tidiness of a banker's office, the elegance and refinement of a lady's boudoir, and, above all, the peculiar perfume of the workshop. It combines the characteristics of the den of the man of letters, the study of the student, the snuggery of the artist. 'L'amice che m'accompagnava,' says De Amicis, in relating a visit which he paid to Daudet, 'mi disse nell' orecchie, accennando interne: "Ci si vede la mano della donna."' And the friend of De Amicis was right; one does see a woman's hand in Daudet's room, and a loving hand at that. One sees those 'heavenly roses,' of which Schiller speaks, 'woven into an earthly life.' One fancies that David Copperfield received Dan'l, on his return from Australia, in just such a room, and that, if Dan'l had had an observant friend with him, he would have said: 'Ci si vede la mano della donna.'

To the left, as one enters, is the writing-table, a large and ornamental one, of solid carved oak. On it all the papers and books are arranged with methodical precision. The pens are clean, the crystal inkstand is free from stains, and all the paraphernalia of the writer's craft show themselves in holiday attire. Behind the table stands a comfortable chair, stately and decorative, although less throne-like than the one that may be seen in Zola's temple-like study. To the left of the writing-table,

against the wall, is a very striking buffet from some Norman château in time-worn oak, a handsome piece of furniture, which Paul Renouard would buy at any cost. Behind the writing-chair is a low bookcase, the shelves of which are covered with a triple row of books, each one most neatly, and some decoratively, bound. Above the bookcase a not very successful portrait of Madame Daudet smiles down on the visitor. The floor is comfortably carpeted, and the armchairs which stand about the room witness to the hospitality of the owner. To the right of the writing-table is one of the three windows which, draped with red curtains of an Oriental pattern, light up the study. These three windows look out on a pleasant garden, and, as they face the South and Provence, the sun streams into the room nearly all the day. Between the table and the window which is to the right of it is a door, which opens into the tapestried and unpretentious drawing-room. Facing the table is the fireplace, adorned with a carved overmantel, in which, in a little niche, stands mercurial Figaro, reminding one of the laboriousness of Beaumarchais and of the patronage of De Villemessant. To the right and the left of the fireplace are two couches, and between there stands a little Oriental table, on which cigars, cigarettes, and the latest books are

always to be found. Daudet's favourite seat is on the couch to the left of the fireplace, with his back to the light, and his eyes in full view of an idealized portrait of Flaubert, which hangs on the wall between the door leading from the antechamber and the Normandy buffet. Behind the couch on the right and to the right of it, against the wall, is a high bookcase. It is on this couch that the visitor usually sits, facing the host. Here is De Goncourt's place, and here at times Henry James will sit and talk or be silent with Alphonse Daudet for hours together.

The welcome extended, even to strangers, in this room is of the essence of hospitality. Those who are familiar with Alphonse Daudet are called by him 'my sons'; but, to be a son, one must belong to the freemasonry of letters or of art.

It is in this room that Daudet receives his friends on Sunday morning, the only morning in the week when he does not work. On those days, from ten till twelve in the morning, his valet is constantly occupied in opening the door which leads out on to the most elegant staircase in Paris.

Amongst his constant visitors are Marcel Schwob, the editor of the weekly literary supplement of the *Echo de Paris*, a young man who knows more of English literature than any man in France,

and who will spend hours in reading aloud to Daudet, and translating as he goes along, from Swift, Defoe, Stevenson, or Addison's *Spectator;* Hugues Leroux, a brisk young knight of the Legion of Honour, who is a journalist because he has a wife and children, and cannot give himself to pure literature; Louis de Robert, a still younger man, who in *Le Journal* displays a sense of style and a knowledge of the human heart amazing in one so young; the Coquelins, who are the Coquelins; the Conservator of the Versailles Museum, an artist appointed guardian of Philistia; Frantz Jourdain, an architect, who emerges from the straight lines of his craft in the curves and fancies of the novel; Henry Céard, one of the best read men in Paris, the librarian of the Carnavalet Museum, who supplied Emile Zola with his best documents, and is a handsome, eyeglass-wearing, frock-coated gentleman; Paul Margueritte, whose father was killed at Sédan, and who is envious of the income of George Ohnet; Rosny, of 'Le Bilateral' and other intense novels of a Socialistic tendency, who hides under a threadbare frock-coat one of the finest artistic natures in Paris; Gustave Geffroy, who has worn out his eyes in the *salles de rédaction* of Parisian newspapers, and yet has a keen insight, as his novels show; and others by the score,

the whole Tout-Paris of literature and art. And, most welcome presence of all, De Goncourt, who 'has reached such a point of intimacy with Daudet that we sit together for hours without exchanging a hundred words, and are happy all the time.'

On Thursdays Madame Daudet holds her receptions, and on this occasion the door between the writing-table and the window to the right of it is thrown open. In the tapestried drawing-room there is music, and if the pianist be a facile one, Daudet will keep him at the instrument till late into the night. Léon Daudet is always present at his mother's receptions, and, if any Englishmen are present, will inform himself on any points which have been left undecided in discussions with his intimate friend, Marcel Schwob. 'What about Walt Whitman?' 'Et ce Stevenson?' His wife, *née* Jeanne Hugo, a woman in the Rubens style, endowed with wit and a warm heart, hands round tea, sometimes assisted by Madame Descaves, the wife of a plump little man, whose comfortable presence is in contradiction with the bitterness which he expressed in 'Sous-Offs.'

It is on Thursdays, most often, that one dines *chez* Daudet, a comfortable dinner, sweetened by the presence of altogether lovable people. At the head of the table sits the beloved master of the

house, and opposite him Madame Daudet, whose constant attention to the details of hospitality make one wonder if this lady be indeed the sensitive author of the 'Impressions de Nature et d'Art.' Somewhere down the table will be seen Jeanne Daudet, *née* Hugo, who is a brilliant talker and can discuss your Balzac or your Ibsen with the best of them. Sometimes the pale face and crushed vitality of George Courteline, a living criticism on the brutality of the French military service, may be discerned across the flowers of the *épergne*, silent and observant, with occasional outbursts of a very characteristic humour. The conversation is general. Daudet has the art of gathering round his table only those who can listen as well as talk. He himself will listen amiably, and offer comment where occasion requires. Only, however, when De Goncourt is present the conversation is less general, and the guests listen rather than hold forth, for whatever De Goncourt says is worth hearing, even though flavoured now and then with a tinge of bitterness, provoked by the disappointments of a misunderstood career.

It is a comfortable dinner and a comfortable company, and one rises from the liberal table with a satisfaction alike of mind and body, looking forward to the after-dinner *causeries* of the master of the

house. For the most part, unless there be musicians in the tapestried drawing-room, he will be found on his chair behind the writing-table in his study. And it is books and books and books that one talks about, whilst the master twirls between the nervous fingers of his waxen hand a cigarette, which in his forgetfulness he is constantly allowing to go out.

One cannot conceive a more paternal man than Alphonse Daudet shows himself towards 'his sons.' 'What have you been writing of late, mon fils? Tell me about it. You must remember to bring it next Sunday and translate me passages. In the meanwhile give me a general idea of the subject. I see that you are not smoking. You will find some cigars in that box there, between Catulle Mendés' last volume, a masterpiece, and that heap of manuscript. So, and now give me a light. This is the pipe which Flaubert bequeathed to me. But, why don't you sit down? You may sit down here and smoke into the bargain. We are not under the circumstances depicted in Raffet's picture. You remember the guards under Napoleon in Italy, when they spent the night in a swamp, near Arcole, and were told that they mustn't smoke, but that they might sit down—in two feet of water! I wish I could write about Napoleon from the point of view that Napoleon was a Meridional, which is a circum-

stance which explains all the faults which his northern critics have found in that very great man.' And so on, a flood of conversation of the most entertaining nature, a will-o'-the-wisp conversation, which only leads one into pleasant places, and is altogether kind, sympathetic, and straightforward.

In the summer months the Daudets live down at Champrosay, near Draveil, by Etiolles, where D'Argenton flourished. Their house is not far from the house where Daudet wrote many of his masterpieces, the house of the Allards, Madame Daudet's parents. It is a very comfortable house, which ceases to be a château where châteaudom would be oppressive. Behind the house there stretches down to the Seine, which in this district is an unsophisticated river, a pleasant pleasure-garden, with fruit-trees and timber, and paddocks and a tennis-ground. The house is near the Sennart forest, and not far from the scene of the attack on the Lyons Mail. Daudet, with his hatred for Lyons, would possibly have approved of Lesurques. Here Daudet is to be seen in his happiest moods. He loves the country, and Madame Daudet shares his affection for unbounded horizons and the green, rather than the gray. Here one may meet Madame Allard, his mother-in-law, a comfortable and soothing presence, such as one would have expected at Rydal Mount in Words-

worth's days. A calm, placid old lady, who has said her say, as in 'Les Marges de la Vie,' and is now satisfied to enjoy the serenity of a noble old age. She talks, but does not discuss, and seems more interested in the doings of little Charles Daudet, her great-grandson, and also the great-grandson of Victor Hugo, as under the motherly child-eyes of Edmée Daudet he toddles across the room—a pale child, with a prominent forehead and eyes—than in any pother about the sonnet as compared to the triolet.

Here Daudet may be found in his serenest moods. 'Give me your arm, my son, and let us walk on the lawn.' And when not walking he will most often be found sitting on the terrace, which looks on the Seine, in a hooded chair, twirling a cigarette in the fingers of his waxen hands. 'There is an immense working power in tobacco,' he will say. 'In writing I have always found my capacity for work diminish as the tobacco in my pipe burned lower and lower.' It was on this terrace that one night, as the writer was sitting with the master, and they had been silent together for a long time, the news of De Maupassant's death was communicated to Alphonse Daudet. 'My father,' said Jeanne Daudet, putting her head through the glazed door, 'do you know De Maupassant is dead?' And Daudet said nothing,

keeping his eyes fixed on the Seine, from which a white vapour rose and slowly progressed citywards; and he said nothing.

On this terrace, also, he may be found in studious hours, with Defoe, Chateaubriand, Montaigne, and Shakespeare piled around him on neighbouring chairs and tables. 'Shakespeare,' he may say, 'is one of the writers with whom I hope to die. His works shall be the bedside-book by the side of my last bed. I keep a few books very close to me, so that when death does come, they may be my companions to the end.'

So may Alphonse Daudet be heard to speak, and the person to whom he so speaks will always turn away his face.

'I often hope for death,' he adds. 'Give me a light, my son. Yes, I often hope for death, which shall bring me an end to all my pain. And I know that I shall survive.'

'In your books, master?'

'No; my books have been but the expansion of an active nature, which might have exerted itself in many other ways.' Then, pointing to Léon, Lucien, and Edmée, watching with motherly eyes over little Charles Daudet's tottering steps, he adds, 'No, in my children.'

And as he speaks a bright light comes into his

weary eyes, and over the tortured face there spreads so sweet a smile, that one would like to put one's arms about 'Little-What's-His-Name's' neck and kiss his face and cry at the unutterable sadness of knowing such a man and hearing him speak of death.*

* See note at end of Preface.

THE END.

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PAGE

ADDERLEY.—Stephen Remarx . 12
ADLER.—Instruction of Children . 24
AMARANTHE (L') . . . . . 15
AMERICAN PHILOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION . . . . 19
ANGLO-SAXON POETRY, Library of 26
ARROWSMITH.—Rigveda . . 27

BAUMANN.—Betterment . . 21
BELL.—Poems . . . . . 9
,, Name above every Name 9
,, Diana's Looking-glass . 9
BENSON.—Men of Might . . 14
BOYLE.—Recollections of the Dean of Salisbury . . . . 3
BROWN. — Pleasurable Poultry Keeping . . 10
,, Poultry Keeping as an Industry . . 10
,, Industrial Poultry Keeping . . 10
BURBIDGE.—Wild Flowers in Art and Nature . . . . 8
BURGESS.—Political Science . 21
BUTLER.—Select Essays of Sainte Beuve . . . . . 6

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,, Homilies of Science . 20
CHERBULIEZ.—The Tutor's Secret 13
CHILDREN'S FAVOURITE SERIES . 11
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CLIFFORD.—Love Letters . . 13
CLOWES.—Double Emperor . 7
COLLINS.—School Shakespeare . 25
COOK.—Sidney's Defense of Poesy 22
,, Shelley's Defence of Poetry 22
CUSTANCE.—Riding Recollections 16

DAVIDSON—Handbook to Dante . 22
,, Education of Greek People . . . . . 23
DICKENS, CHILDREN'S . . 15

PAGE

DISNEY.—Law relating to Schoolmasters . . . 21

ENGLISH CLASSICS FOR THE YOUNG . . . . . 28
ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE . . . . . 18
EVERETT.—Ethics for Young People . . . 15

FAWCETT.—Hartmann the Anarchist . . . 13
,, Riddle of the Universe . . . . 20
,, Swallowed by an Earthquake . . 7
FORUM . . . . . 29
FOWLER.—Old County Life . 16

GARDNER.—Friends of Olden Time . . . 15
GARBE—Kapila's Aphorisms . 27
GARNETT.—English Prose Selections . . . 22
GAUNT.—Dave's Sweetheart . 13
GOSCHEN.—Use of Imagination . 20
GOSSIP.—Chess Manual . . 6
GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS . . 15
GREENSTREET.—Fouillée's Education . . 24

HALL.—King Horn . . . 26
HANS ANDERSEN.—Tales from 14
HARE.—Memoir of Maria Edgeworth . . . . . 2
HARTSHORNE. — Glasses and Goblets . 9
HARVARD. — Historical Monographs . . 21
,, Oriental Series . 27
HERBERT.—Fifty Breakfasts . 5
,, Common-sense Cookery 5

| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| HERVEY.—Golden Reef | 7 |
| HOLE.—Little Tour in Ireland | 4 |
| ,, Addresses to Working Men | 4 |
| ,, Memories | 4 |
| ,, More Memories | 4 |
| ,, Book about Garden | 4 |
| ,, Book about Roses | 4 |
| HOWE.—Science Teaching | 23 |
| HUDSON.—Characters of Shakespeare | 22 |
| ,, Harvard Shakespeare | 22 |
| HUNT.—What is Poetry? | 22 |
| HUTCHINSON. — That Fiddler Fellow | 13 |
| INDIA OFFICE PUBLICATIONS | 27 |
| INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SERIES | 23 |
| JOHNSON.—Richard II. | 25 |
| ,, Midsummer Night's Dream | 25 |
| KAY.—Omarah's Yaman | 27 |
| KERN.—Jātaka Mālā | 27 |
| KNUTSFORD.—Mystery Rue Soly | 12 |
| LAMB.—Adventures of Ulysses | 14 |
| LANMAN.—Sanskrit Reader | 27 |
| LATHAM.—Dante's Letters | 22 |
| LAWRENCE.—English Metre | 22 |
| LECKY.—Value of History | 20 |
| LE FANU.—Irish Life | 16 |
| LOTZE.—Philosophical Outlines | 20 |
| MARTIN.—Public School System | 23 |
| McNULTY.—Misther O'Ryan | 12 |
| 'MEDICINE LADY, THE,' authors of.—This Troublesome World | 13 |
| MILNER.—England in Egypt | 20 |
| Modern Men | 21 |
| MORGAN.—Animal Life | 19 |
| ,, Animal Sketches | 19 |
| MORGAN.—Springs of Conduct | 19 |
| ,, Psychology for Teachers | 19 |
| MORPHOLOGY, JOURNAL OF | 19 |
| MORRISON.—Historical Geography | 21 |
| NASH.—Barerock | 7 |
| NATIONAL REVIEW | 29 |
| OMAN.—History of England | 25 |
| PAYNE.—Rosseau's Emile | 24 |
| PEEL.—Polar Gleams | 18 |
| PERRY.—Sanskrit Primer | 27 |
| PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW | 19 |
| POPE.—Memoir of Sir John Macdonald | 1 |
| PORTAL.—Mission to Abyssinia | 17 |
| ,, Mission to Uganda | 17 |
| PREYER.—Infant Mind | 23 |
| RANSOME.—Battles of Frederick the Great | 14 |
| RODD.—Poems | 17 |
| ,, Feda | 17 |
| ,, Unknown Madonna | 17 |
| ,, Violet Crown | 17 |
| ,, Customs of Modern Greece | 17 |
| SANTLEY.—Student and Singer | 16 |
| SCARTAZZINI. — Handbook to Dante | 22 |
| SCHELLING.—Jonson's Timber | 22 |
| SHARPLESS.—English Education | 23 |
| SHELLEY.—Defence of Poetry | 22 |
| SHERARD.—Life of Daudet | 3 |
| SIDNEY.—Defense of Poesy | 22 |
| SPARKES.—Wild Flowers in Art | 8 |
| STEPHENSON.—Farm Dairying | 10 |
| TATHAM.—Men of Might | 14 |
| THAYER.—Elizabethan Plays | 22 |
| TWINING. — Recollections of a Social Worker | 16 |
| WHITE.—Bee-Keeping | 10 |
| WHITMORE.—Unionist Government | 21 |
| Winchester College | 9 |
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| YOUNG.—General Astronomy | 21 |

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